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Chas. Fairchild
THE Oct 1857

MISCELLANEOUS WORKS

OF

WILLIAM HAZLITT.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

VOL. IV.

NEW YORK:
DERBY & JACKSON, 119 NASSAU ST.,
1857.

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LECTURES

ON THE

ENGLISH COMIC WRITERS.

BY WILLIAM HAZLITT.

FROM THE THIRD LONDON EDITION,
EDITED BY HIS SON.

"It is a very good office one man does another, when he tells him the manner of his being pleased."—STEELE.

NEW YORK:
DERBY & JACKSON, 119 NASSAU-ST.,
1857.

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THIS VOLUME IS INSCRIBED

TO ONE OF

THE BEST ENGLISH COMIC WRITERS OF HIS TIME,

LAMAN BLANCHARD,

AS A TOKEN OF

THE EDITOR'S SINCERE ATTACHMENT AND RESPECT.

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NOTICE.

THE Lectures forming this volume were delivered at the Surrey Institution in 1818, and published immediately afterwards. The present Edition, however, contains some additions from other sources, collected by the author, apparently with a view to a reprint of the volume, which additions are distinguished by brackets. Some of these are taken from an article contributed by the author to the *Morning Chronicle* in, I think, 1813, and the rest are critical prefaces, written by my father for Mr. Oxberry's Editions of the various Plays remarked upon. Having determined upon the speedy publication, in a collective form, of the whole of my father's writings on Art, and Artists, together with some pieces on these subjects not hitherto edited, I at first conceived it advisable to transfer the 'Lecture on Hogarth' to this latter work, where, possibly, in some points of view, it might appear better placed; but, on reflection, I have retained that Lecture in its original position; for, after all, Hogarth was a comic writer, and one of our best; the only difference is, that he wrote on canvass.

W. H.

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LECTURES

ON THE

ENGLISH COMIC WRITERS.

LECTURE I.—INTRODUCTORY.

On Wit and Humour.

Man is the only animal that laughs and weeps; for he is the only animal that is struck with the difference between what things are, and what they ought to be. We weep at what thwarts or exceeds our desires in serious matters: we laugh at what only disappoints our expectations in trifles. We shed tears from sympathy with real and necessary distress; as we burst into laughter from want of sympathy with that which is unreasonable and unnecessary, the absurdity of which provokes our spleen or mirth, rather than any serious reflections on it.

To explain the nature of laughter and tears, is to account for the condition of human life; for it is in a manner compounded of these two! It is a tragedy or a comedy—sad or merry, as it happens. The crimes and misfortunes that are inseparable from it, shock and wound the mind when they once seize upon it, and when the pressure can no longer be borne, seek relief in tears: the follies and absurdities that men commit, or the odd accidents that befal them, afford us amusement from the very rejection of these false claims upon our sympathy, and end in laughter. If everything that went wrong, if every vanity or

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weakness in another gave us a sensible pang, it would be hard indeed: but as long as the disagreeableness of the consequences of a sudden disaster is kept out of sight by the immediate oddity of the circumstances, and the absurdity or unaccountableness of a foolish action is the most striking thing in it, the ludicrous prevails over the pathetic, and we receive pleasure instead of pain from the farce of life which is played before us, and which discomposes our gravity as often as it fails to move our anger or our pity!

Tears may be considered as the natural and involuntary resource of the mind overcome by some sudden and violent emotion, before it has had time to reconcile its feelings to the change of circumstances: while laughter may be defined to be the same sort of convulsive and involuntary movement, occasioned by mere surprise or contrast (in the absence of any more serious emotion,) before it has time to reconcile its belief to contradictory appearances. If we hold a mask before our face, and approach a child with this disguise on, it will at first, from the oddity and incongruity of the appearance, be inclined to laugh; if we go nearer to it, steadily, and without saying a word, it will begin to be alarmed, and be half-inclined to cry: if we suddenly take off the mask, it will recover from its fears, and burst out a-laughing; but if, instead of presenting the old well-known countenance, we have concealed a satyr's head or some frightful caricature behind the first mask, the suddenness of the change will not in this case be a source of merriment to it, but will convert its surprise into an agony of consternation, and will make it scream out for help, even though it may be convinced that the whole is a trick at bottom.

The alternation of tears and laughter, in this little episode in common life, depends almost entirely on the greater or less degree of interest attached to the different changes of appearance.

The mere suddenness of the transition, the mere baulking our expectations, and turning them abruptly into another channel, seems to give additional liveliness and gaiety to the animal spirits; but the instant the change is not only sudden, but threatens serious consequences, or calls up the shape of danger, terror supersedes our disposition to mirth, and laughter gives

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place to tears. It is usual to play with infants, and make them laugh by clapping your hands suddenly before them; but if you clapped your hands too loud, or too near their sight, their countenances immediately change, and they hide them in the nurse's arms. Or suppose the same child, grown up a little older, comes to a place, expecting to meet a person it is particularly fond of, and does not find that person there, its countenance suddenly falls, its lips begin to quiver, its cheek turns pale, its eye glistens, and it vents its little sorrow (grown too big to be concealed) in a flood of tears. Again, if the child meets the same person unexpectedly after a long absence, the same effect will be produced by an excess of joy, with different accompaniments; that is, the surprise and the emotion excited will make the blood come into his face, his eyes sparkle, his tongue falter or be mute, but in either case the tears will gush to his relief, and lighten the pressure about his heart. On the other hand, if a child is playing at hide-and-seek, or blind-man's-buff, with persons it is ever so fond of, and either misses them where it had made sure of finding them, or suddenly runs up against them where it had least expected it, the shock or additional impetus given to the imagination by the disappointment or the discovery, in a matter of this indifference, will only vent itself in a fit of laughter.* The transition here is not from one thing of importance to another, or from a state of indifference to a state of strong excitement; but merely from one impression to another that we did not at all expect, and when we had expected just the contrary. The mind having been led to form a certain conclusion, and the result producing an immediate solution of continuity in the chain of our ideas, this alternate excitement and relaxation of the imagination, the object also striking upon the mind more vividly in its loose unsettled state, and before it has had time to recover and collect itself, causes that alternate excitement and relaxation, or irregular convulsive movement of the muscular and nervous system, which consti-

* A child that has hid itself out of the way in sport, is under a great temptation to laugh at the unconsciousness of others as to its situation. A person concealed from assassins, is in no danger of betraying his situation by laughing.

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tutes physical laughter. The *discontinuous* in our sensations produces a correspondent jar and discord in the frame. The steadiness of our faith and of our features begins to give way at the same time. We turn with an incredulous smile from a story that staggers our belief: and we are ready to split our sides with laughing at an extravagance that sets all common sense and serious concern at defiance.

To understand or define the ludicrous, we must first know what the serious is. Now the serious is the habitual stress which the mind lays upon the expectation of a given order of events, following one another with a certain regularity and weight of interest attached to them. When this stress is increased beyond its usual pitch of intensity, so as to overstrain the feelings by the violent opposition of good to bad, or of objects to our desires, it becomes the pathetic or tragical. The ludicrous, or comic, is the unexpected loosening or relaxing this stress below its usual pitch of intensity, by such an abrupt transposition of the order of our ideas, as taking the mind unawares, throws it off its guard, startles it into a lively sense of pleasure, and leaves no time nor inclination for painful reflections.

The essence of the laughable then is the incongruous, the disconnecting one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another. The first and most obvious cause of laughter is to be found in the simple succession of events, as in the sudden shifting of a disguise, or some unlooked-for accident, without any absurdity of character or situation. The accidental contradiction between our expectations and the event can hardly be said, however, to amount to the ludicrous; it is merely laughable. The ludicrous is where there is the same contradiction between the object and our expectations, heightened by some deformity or inconvenience, that is, by its being contrary to what is customary or desirable; as the ridiculous, which is the highest degree of the laughable, is that which is contrary not only to custom but to sense and reason, or is a voluntary departure from what we have a right to expect from those who are conscious of absurdity and propriety in words, looks, and actions.

Of these different kinds or degrees of the laughable, the first is the most shallow and short-lived; for the instant the imme-

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diate surprise of a thing's merely happening one way or another is over, there is nothing to throw us back upon our former expectation, and renew our wonder at the event a second time. The second sort, that is, the ludicrous arising out of the improbable or distressing, is more deep and lasting, either because the painful catastrophe excites a greater curiosity, or because the old impression, from its habitual hold on the imagination, still recurs mechanically, so that it is longer before we can seriously make up our minds to the unaccountable deviation from it. The third sort, or the ridiculous arising out of absurdity as well as improbability, that is, where the defect or weakness is of a man's own seeking, is the most refined of all, but not always so pleasant as the last, because the same contempt and disapprobation which sharpens and subtilises our sense of the impropriety, adds a severity to it inconsistent with perfect ease and enjoyment. This last species is properly the province of satire. The principle of contrast is, however, the same in all the stages, in the simply laughable, the ludicrous, the ridiculous; and the effect is only the more complete, the more durably and pointedly this principle operates.

To give some examples in these different kinds. We laugh, when children, at the sudden removing of a paste-board mask: we laugh, when grown up, more gravely at the tearing off the mask of deceit. We laugh at absurdity; we laugh at deformity. We laugh at a bottle-nose in a caricature; at a stuffed figure of an alderman in a pantomime, and at the tale of Slaukenbergius. A dwarf standing by a giant makes a contemptible figure enough. Rosinante and Dapple are laughable from contrast, as their masters from the same principle make two for a pair. We laugh at the dress of foreigners, and they at ours. Three chimney-sweepers meeting three Chinese in Lincoln's Inn Fields, they laughed at one another till they were ready to drop down. Country people laugh at a person because they never saw him before. Any one dressed in the height of the fashion, or quite out of it, is equally an object of ridicule. One rich source of the ludicrous is distress with which we cannot sympathise from its absurdity or insignificance. Women laugh at their lovers. We laugh at a damned author, in spite of our

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teeth, and though he may be our friend. "There is something in the misfortunes of our best friends that pleases us." We laugh at people on the top of a stage-coach, or in it, if they seem in great extremity. It is hard to hinder children from laughing at a stammerer, at a negro, at a drunken man, or even at a madman. We laugh at mischief. We laugh at what we do not believe. We say that an argument or an assertion that is very absurd, is quite ludicrous. We laugh to show our satisfaction with ourselves, or our contempt for those about us, or to conceal our envy or our ignorance. We laugh at fools, and at those who pretend to be wise—at extreme simplicity, awkwardness, hypocrisy, and affectation. "They were talking of me," says Scrub, "for they laughed *consumedly*." Lord Foppington's insensibility to ridicule, and airs of ineffable self-conceit, are no less admirable; and Joseph Surface's cant maxims of morality, when once disarmed of their power to do hurt, become sufficiently ludicrous. We laugh at that in others which is a serious matter to ourselves; because our self-love is stronger than our sympathy, sooner takes the alarm, and instantly turns our heedless mirth into gravity, which only enhances the jest to others. Some one is generally sure to be the sufferer by a joke. What is sport to one is death to another. It is only very sensible or very honest people who laugh as freely at their own absurdities as at those of their neighbours. In general the contrary rule holds, and we only laugh at those misfortunes in which we are spectators, not sharers. The injury, the disappointment, shame, and vexation that we feel put a stop to our mirth; while the disasters that come home to us, and excite our repugnance and dismay, are an amusing spectacle to others. The greater resistance we make, and the greater the perplexity into which we are thrown, the more lively and *piquant* is the intellectual display of cross-purposes to the by-standers. Our humiliation is their triumph. We are occupied with the disagreeableness of the result instead of its oddity or unexpectedness. Others see only the conflict of motives and the sudden alternation of events —we feel the pain as well, which more than counterbalances the speculative entertainment we might receive from the contemplation of our abstract situation.

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You cannot force people to laugh, you cannot give a reason why they should laugh;—they must laugh of themselves, or not at all. As we laugh from a spontaneous impulse, we laugh the more at any restraint upon this impulse. We laugh at a thing merely because we ought not. If we think we must not laugh, this perverse impediment makes our temptation to laugh the greater; for by endeavouring to keep the obnoxious image out of sight, it comes upon us more irresistibly and repeatedly, and the inclination to indulge our mirth, the longer it is held back, collects its force, and breaks out the more violently in peals of laughter. In like manner anything we must not think of makes us laugh, by its coming upon us by stealth and unawares, and from the very efforts we make to exclude it. A secret, a loose word, a wanton jest, makes people laugh. Aretine laughed himself to death at hearing a lascivious story. Wickedness is often made a substitute for wit; and in most of our good old comedies the intrigue of the plot and the double meaning of the dialogue go hand-in-hand, and keep up the ball with wonderful spirit between them. The consciousness, however it may arise, that there is something that we ought to look grave at, is almost always a signal for laughter outright: we can hardly keep our countenance at a sermon, a funeral, or a wedding. What an excellent old custom was that of throwing the stocking! What a deal of innocent mirth has been spoiled by the disuse of it! It is not an easy matter to preserve decorum in courts of justice; the smallest circumstance that interferes with the solemnity of the proceedings throws the whole place into an uproar of laughter. People at the point of death often say smart things. Sir Thomas More jested with his executioner: Rabelais and Wycherley both died with a *bon-mot* in their mouths.

Misunderstandings (*malentendus*,) where one person means one thing, and another is aiming at something else, are another great source of comic humour, on the same principle of ambiguity and contrast.

There is a high-wrought instance of this in the dialogue between Aimwell and Gibbet, in the 'Beaux' Stratagem,' where Aimwell mistakes his companion for an officer in a marching regiment, and Gibbet takes it for granted that the gentleman is

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a highwayman. The alarm and consternation occasioned by some one saying to him in the course of common conversation, "I apprehend you," is the most ludicrous thing in that admirably natural and powerful performance, Mr. Emery's 'Robert Tyke.' Again, unconsciousness in the person himself of what he is about, or of what others think of him, is also a great heightener of the sense of absurdity. It makes it come the fuller home upon us from his insensibility to it. His simplicity sets off the satire, and gives it a finer edge. It is a more extreme case still where the person is aware of being the object of ridicule, and yet seems perfectly reconciled to it as a matter of course. So wit is often the more forcible and pointed for being dry and serious, for it then seems as if the speaker himself had no intention in it, and we were the first to find it out. Irony, as a species of wit, owes its force to the same principle. In such cases it is the contrast between the appearance and the reality, the suspense of belief, and the seeming incongruity, that gives point to the ridicule, and makes it enter the deeper when the first impression is overcome. Excessive impudence, as in the 'Liar;' or excessive modesty, as in the hero of 'She Stoops to Conquer;' or a mixture of the two, as in the 'Busy Body,' are equally amusing. Lying is a species of wit and humour. To lay anything to a person's charge from which he is perfectly free, shows spirit and invention; and the more incredible the effrontery, the greater is the joke.

There is nothing more powerfully humorous than what is called *keeping* in comic character, as we see it very finely exemplified in Sancho Panza and Don Quixote. The proverbial phlegm and the romantic gravity of these two celebrated persons may be regarded as the height of this kind of excellence. The deep feeling of character strengthens the sense of the ludicrous. Keeping in comic character is consistency in absurdity; a determined and laudable attachment to the incongruous and singular. The regularity completes the contradiction; for the number of instances of deviation from the right line, branching out in all directions, shows the inveteracy of the original bias to any extravagance or folly, the natural improbability, as it were, increasing every time with the multiplication of chances for a

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return to common sense, and in the end mounting up to an incredible and unaccountably ridiculous height, when we find our expectations as invariably baffled. The most curious problem of all, is this truth of absurdity to itself. That reason and good sense should be consistent, is not wonderful: but that caprice, and whim, and fantastical prejudice, should be uniform and infallible in their results, is the surprising thing. But while this characteristic clue to absurdity helps on the ridicule, it also softens and harmonises its excesses; and the ludicrous is here blended with a certain beauty and decorum, from this very truth of habit and sentiment, or from the principle of similitude and dissimilitude. The devotion to nonsense, and enthusiasm about trifles, is highly affecting as a moral lesson: it is one of the striking weaknesses and greatest happinesses of our nature. That which excites so lively and lasting an interest in itself, even though it should not be wisdom, is not despicable in the sight of reason and humanity. We cannot suppress the smile on the lip; but the tear should also stand ready to start from the eye. The history of hobby-horses is equally instructive and delightful; and after the pair I have just alluded to, My Uncle Toby's is one of the best and gentlest that "ever lifted leg!" The inconveniences, odd accidents, falls, and bruises to which they expose their riders, contribute their share to the amusement of the spectators; and the blows and wounds that the Knight of the Sorrowful Countenance received in his many perilous adventures, have applied their healing influence to many a hurt mind.—In what relates to the laughable, as it arises from unforeseen accidents or self-willed scrapes, the pain, the shame, the mortification, and utter helplessness of situation, add to the joke, provided they are momentary, or overwhelming only to the imagination of the sufferer. Malvolio's punishment and apprehensions are as comic, from our knowing that they are not real, as Christopher Sly's drunken transformation and short-lived dream of happiness are for the like reason. Parson Adams's fall into the tub at the Squire's, or his being discovered in bed with Mrs. Slipslop, though pitiable, are laughable accidents; nor do we read with much gravity of the loss of his Æschylus, serious as it was to him at the time. A Scotch clergyman, as he was

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going to church, seeing a spruce, conceited mechanic, who was walking before him, suddenly covered all over with dirt, either by falling into the kennel, or by some other calamity befalling him, smiled and passed on; but afterwards seeing the same person, who had stopped to refit, seated directly facing him in the gallery, with a look of perfect satisfaction and composure, as if nothing of the sort had happened to him, the idea of his late disaster and present self-complacency struck him so powerfully, that, unable to resist the impulse, he flung himself back in the pulpit, and laughed till he could laugh no longer. I remember reading a story in an odd number of the 'European Magazine,' of an old gentleman who used to walk out every afternoon with a gold-headed cane, in the fields opposite Baltimore House, which were then open, only with foot-paths crossing them. He was frequently accosted by a beggar with a wooden leg, to whom he gave money, which only made him more importunate. One day, when he was more troublesome than usual, a well-dressed person happening to come up, and observing how saucy the fellow was, said to the gentleman, "Sir, if you will lend me your cane for a moment, I'll give him a good threshing for his impertinence." The old gentleman, smiling at the proposal, handed him his cane, which the other no sooner was going to apply to the shoulders of the culprit, than he immediately whipped off his wooden leg, and scampered off with great alacrity, and his chastiser after him as hard as he could go. The faster the one ran the faster the other followed him, brandishing the cane, to the great astonishment of the gentleman who owned it, till having fairly crossed the fields, they suddenly turned a corner, and nothing more was seen of either of them.

In the way of mischievous adventure, and a wanton exhibition of ludicrous weakness in character, nothing is superior to the comic parts of the 'Arabian Nights' Entertainments.' To take only the set of stories of the Little Hunchback, who was choked with a bone, and the Barber of Bagdad and his seven brothers—there is that of the tailor who was persecuted by the miller's wife, and who, after toiling all night in the mill, got nothing for his pains—of another who fell in love with a fine lady, who pretended to return his passion, and inviting him to

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her house, as the preliminary condition of her favour, had his eyebrows shaved, his clothes stripped off, and being turned loose into a winding gallery, he was to follow her, and by overtaking obtain all his wishes, but after a turn or two, stumbled on a trap-door, and fell plump into the street, to the great astonishment of the spectators and his own, shorn of his eyebrows, naked, and without a ray of hope left:—that of the castle-building pedler, who in kicking his wife, the supposed daughter of an emperor, kicks down his basket of glass, the brittle foundation of his ideal wealth, his good fortune, and his arrogance:—that, again, of the beggar who dined with the Barmecide, and feasted with him on the names of wines and dishes: and, last and best of all, the inimitable story of the impertinent Barber, himself one of the seven, and worthy to be so; his pertinacious, incredible, teasing, deliberate, yet well-meaning folly, his wearing out the patience of the young gentleman whom he is sent for to shave, his preparations and his professions of speed, his taking out an astrolabe to measure the height of the sun while his razors are getting ready, his dancing the dance of Zimri and singing the song of Zamtout, his disappointing the young man of an assignation, following him to the place of rendezvous, and alarming the master of the house in his anxiety for his safety, by which his unfortunate patron loses his hand in the affray, and this is felt as an awkward accident. The danger which the same loquacious person is afterwards in of losing his head for want of saying who he was, because he would not forfeit his character of being "justly called the Silent," is a consummation of the jest, though, if it had really taken place, it would have been carrying the joke too far. There are a thousand instances of the same sort in the Thousand and One Nights, which are an inexhaustible mine of comic humour and invention, and which, from the manners of the East which they describe, carry the principle of callous indifference in a jest as far as it can go. The serious and marvellous stories in that work, which have been so much admired and so greedily read, appear to me monstrous and abortive fictions, like disjointed dreams, dictated by a preternatural dread of arbitrary and despotic power, as the comic and familiar stories are rendered proportionally amusing and interesting from the

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same principle operating in a different direction, and producing endless uncertainty and vicissitude, and an heroic contempt for the untoward accidents and petty vexations of human life. It is the gaiety of despair, the mirth and laughter of a respite during pleasure from death. The strongest instances of effectual and harrowing imagination are in the story of Amine and her three sisters, whom she led by her side as a leash of hounds, and of the *goul* who nibbled grains of rice for her dinner, and preyed on human carcasses. In this condemnation of the serious parts of the Arabian Nights, I have nearly all the world, and in particular the author of the 'Ancient Mariner,' against me, who must be allowed to be a judge of such matters, and who said, with a subtlety of philosophical conjecture which he alone possesses, that "if I did not like them, it was because I did not dream." On the other hand, I have Bishop Atterbury on my side, who, in a letter to Pope, fairly confesses that "he could not read them in his old age."

There is another source of comic humour which has been but little touched on or attended to by the critics—not the infliction of casual pain, but the pursuit of uncertain pleasure and idle gallantry. Half the business and gaiety of comedy turns upon this. Most of the adventures, difficulties, demurs, hair-breadth 'scapes, disguises, deceptions, blunders, disappointments, successes, excuses, all the dextrous manœuvres, artful innuendoes, assignations, billets-doux, *double entendres*, sly allusions, and elegant flattery, have an eye to this—to the obtaining of those "favours secret, sweet, and precious," in which love and pleasure consist, and which when attained, and the *equivoque* is at an end, the curtain drops, and the play is over. All the attractions of a subject that can only be glanced at indirectly, that is a sort of forbidden ground to the imagination, except under severe restrictions, which are constantly broken through; all the resources it supplies for intrigue and invention; the bashfulness of the clownish lover, his looks of alarm and petrified astonishment; the foppish affectation and easy confidence of the happy man; the dress, the airs, the languor, the scorn, and indifference of the fine lady; the bustle, pertness, loquaciousness, and tricks of the chambermaid; the impudence, lies, and roguery of the valet;

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the match-making and unmaking; the wisdom of the wise; the sayings of the witty; the folly of the fool; "the soldier's, scholar's, courtier's eye, tongue, sword, the glass of fashion and the mould of form," have all a view to this. It is the closet of Blue-Beard. It is the life and soul of Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar's plays. It is the salt of comedy, without which it would be worthless and insipid. It makes Horner decent, and Millamant divine. It is the jest between Tattle and Miss Prue. It is the bait with which Olivia, in the 'Plain Dealer,' plays with honest Manly. It lurks at the bottom of the catechism which Archer teaches Cherry, and which she learns by heart. It gives the finishing grace to Mrs. Amlet's confession—"Though I'm old, I'm chaste." Valentine and his Angelica would be nothing without it; Miss Peggy would not be worth a gallant; and Slender's 'sweet Anne Page' would be no more! "The age of comedy would be gone, and the glory of our play-houses extinguished for ever." Our old comedies would be invaluable, were it only for this, that they keep alive this sentiment, which still survives in all its fluttering grace and breathless palpitations on the stage.

Humour is the describing the ludicrous as it is in itself; wit is the exposing it, by comparing or contrasting it with something else. Humour is, as it were, the growth of nature and accident; wit is the product of art and fancy. Humour, as it is shown in books, is an imitation of the natural or acquired absurdities of mankind, or of the ludicrous in accident, situation, and character; wit is the illustrating and heightening the sense of that absurdity by some sudden and unexpected likeness or opposition of one thing to another, which sets off the quality we laugh at or despise in a still more contemptible or striking point of view. Wit, as distinguished from poetry, is the imagination or fancy inverted and so applied to given objects, as to make the little look less, the mean more light and worthless; or to divert our admiration or wean our affections from that which is lofty and impressive, instead of producing a more intense admiration and exalted passion, as poetry does. Wit may sometimes, indeed, be shown in compliments as well as satire; as in the common epigram—

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"Accept a miracle, instead of wit:
See two dull lines with Stanhope's pencil writ."

But then the mode of paying it is playful and ironical, and contradicts itself in the very act of making its own performance an humble foil to another's. Wit hovers round the borders of the light and trifling, whether in matters of pleasure or pain; for as soon as it describes the serious seriously, it ceases to be wit, and passes into a different form. Wit is, in fact, the eloquence of indifference, or an ingenious and striking exposition of those evanescent and glancing impressions of objects which affect us more from surprise or contrast to the train of our ordinary and literal preconceptions, than from anything in the objects themselves exciting our necessary sympathy or lasting hatred. The favourite employment of wit is to add littleness to littleness, and heap contempt on insignificance by all the arts of petty and incessant warfare; or if it ever affects to aggrandise, and use the language of hyperbole, it is only to betray into derision by a fatal comparison, as in the mock-heroic; or if it treats of serious passion, it must do it so as to lower the tone of intense and high-wrought sentiment by the introduction of burlesque and familiar circumstances. To give an instance or two. Butler, in his 'Hudibras,' compares the change of night into day to the change of colour in a boiled lobster.

"The sun had long since, in the lap
Of Thetis, taken out his nap;
And, like a lobster boil'd, the morn
From black to red began to turn:
When Hudibras, whom thoughts and aching
'Twixt sleeping kept all night and waking,
Began to rub his drowsy eyes,
And from his couch prepared to rise,
Resolving to dispatch the deed
He vow'd to do with trusty speed."

Compare this with the following stanzas in Spenser, treating of the same subject:—

"By this the Northern Wagoner had set
His seven-fold team behind the steadfast star,

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That was in ocean waves, yet never wet,
But firm is fix'd and sendeth light from far
To all that in the wide deep wand'ring are:
And cheerful chanticleer with his note shrill,
Had warned once that Phœbus' fiery car
In haste was climbing up the eastern hill,
Full envious that night so long his room did fill.

At last the golden oriental gate
Of greatest heaven 'gan to open fair,
And Phœbus, fresh as bridegroom to his mate,
Came dancing forth, shaking his dewy hair,
And hurl'd his glist'ring beams through gloomy air:
Which when the wakeful elf perceived, straitway
He started up, and did himself prepare
In sun-bright arms and battailous array,
For with that pagan proud he combat will that day."

In this last passage every image is brought forward that can give effect to our natural impressions of the beauty, the splendour, and solemn grandeur of the rising sun; pleasure and power wait on every line and word: whereas, in the other, the only memorable thing is a grotesque and ludicrous illustration of the alteration which takes place from darkness to gorgeous light, and that brought from the lowest instance, and with associations that can only disturb and perplex the imagination in its conception of the real object it describes. There cannot be a more witty, and at the same time degrading comparison, than that in the same author, of the Bear turning round the pole-star to a bear tied to a stake:—

"But now a sport more formidable
Had raked together village rabble;
'Twas an old way of recreating
Which learned butchers call bear-baiting,
A bold adventurous exercise
With ancient heroes in high prize,
For authors do affirm it came
From Isthmian or Nemæan game;
Others derive it from the Bear
That's fixed in northern hemisphere,
And round about his pole does make
A circle like a bear at stake,

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That at the chain's end wheels about
And overturns the rabble rout."

I need not multiply examples of this sort. Wit or ludicrous invention produces its effect oftenest by comparison, but not always. It frequently effects its purposes by unexpected and subtle distinctions. For instance, in the first kind, Mr. Sheridan's description of Mr. Addington's administration as the fag-end of Mr. Pitt's, who had remained so long on the treasury bench that, like Nicias in the fable, "he left the sitting part of the man behind him," is as fine an example of metaphorical wit as any on record. The same idea seems, however, to have been included in the old well-known nickname of the *Rump* Parliament. Almost as happy an instance of the other kind of wit, which consists in sudden retorts, in turns upon an idea, and diverting the train of your adversary's argument abruptly and adroitly into another channel, may be seen in the sarcastic reply of Porson, who hearing some one observe, that "certain modern poets would be read and admired when Homer and Virgil were forgotten," made answer—"And not till then!" Sir Robert Walpole's definition of the gratitude of place-expectants, that "it is a lively sense of *future* favours," is no doubt wit, but it does not consist in the finding out any coincidence or likeness, but in suddenly transposing the order of time in the common account of this feeling, so as to make the professions of those who pretend to it correspond more with their practice. It is filling up a blank in the human heart with a word that explains its hollowness at once. Voltaire's saying, in answer to a stranger who was observing how tall his trees grew—"That they had nothing else to do,"—was a quaint mixture of wit and humour, making it out as if they really led a lazy, laborious life; but there was here neither allusion nor metaphor. Again, that master-stroke in 'Hudibras' is sterling wit and profound satire, where, speaking of certain religious hypocrites, he says, that they

"Compound for sins they are inclined to
By damning those they have no mind to;"

but the wit consists in the truth of the character, and in the happy exposure of the ludicrous contradiction between the pretext

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and the practice; between their lenity towards their own vices, and their severity to those of others. The same principle of nice distinction must be allowed to prevail in those lines of the same author, where he is professing to expound the dreams of judicial astrology.

> "There's but a twinkling of a star
> Betwixt a man of peace and war,
> A thief and justice, fool and knave,
> A huffing officer and a slave;
> A crafty lawyer and pickpocket;
> A great philosopher and a blockhead;
> A formal preacher and a player;
> A learned physician and man-slayer."

The finest piece of wit I know of, is in the lines of Pope on the Lord Mayor's show—

> "Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er;
> But lives in Settle's numbers one day more."

This is certainly as mortifying an inversion of the idea of poetical immortality as could be thought of: it fixes the *maximum* of littleness and insignificance; but it is not by likeness to anything else that it does this, but by literally taking the lowest possible duration of ephemeral reputation, marking it (as with a slider) on the scale of endless renown, and giving a rival credit for it as his loftiest praise. In a word, the shrewd separation or disentangling of ideas that seem the same, or where the secret contradiction is not sufficiently suspected, and is of a ludicrous and whimsical nature, is wit just as much as the bringing together those that appear at first sight totally different. There is then no sufficient ground for admitting Mr. Locke's celebrated definition of wit, which he makes to consist in the finding out striking and unexpected resemblances in things so as to make pleasant pictures in the fancy, while judgment and reason, according to him, lie the clean contrary way, in separating and nicely distinguishing those wherein the smallest difference is to be found.*

* His words are—"If in having our ideas in the memory ready at hand consists quickness of parts, in this of having them unconfused, and being able nicely to distinguish one thing from another, where there is but the

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On this definition, Harris, the author of 'Hermes,' has very well observed, that the demonstrating the equality of the three angles of a right-angled triangle to two right ones, would, upon the principle here stated, be a piece of wit instead of an act of the judgment or understanding, and Euclid's Elements a col lection of epigrams. On the contrary, it has appeared that the detection and exposure of difference, particularly where this implies nice and subtle observation, as in discriminating between pretence and practice, between appearance and reality, is common to wit and satire with judgment and reasoning, and certainly the comparing and connecting our ideas together is an essential part of reason and judgment, as well as of wit and

least difference, consists in a great measure the exactness of judgment and clearness of reason, which is to be observed in one man above another. And hence, perhaps, may be given some reason of that common observation, that men who have a great deal of wit and prompt memories, have not always the clearest judgment or deepest reason. For wit lying mostly in the assemblage of ideas, and putting them together with quickness and variety, wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy; judgment, on the contrary, lies quite on the other side, in separating carefully one from another ideas wherein can be found the least difference, thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another." (*Essay*, vol. i, p. 143.) This definition, such as it is, Mr. Locke took without acknowledgment from Hobbes, who says in his 'Leviathan,' "This difference of quickness in imagining is caused by the difference of men's passions, that love and dislike some one thing, some another, and therefore some men's thoughts run one way, some another, and are held to and observe differently the things that pass through their imagination. And whereas in this succession of thoughts there is nothing to observe in the things they think on, but either in what they be like one another, or in what they be unlike, these that observe their similitudes, in case they be such as are but rarely observed by others, are said to have a good wit, by which is meant on this occasion a good fancy. But they that observe their differences and dissimilitudes, which is called distinguishing and discerning, and judging between thing and thing, in case such discerning be not easy, are said to have a good judgment; and particularly in matter of conversation and business, wherein times, places, and persons are to be discerned, this virtue is called discretion. The former, that is, fancy, without the help of judgment, is not commended for a virtue; but the latter, which is judgment or discretion, is commended for itself, without the help f fancy."—*Leviathan*, p. 32.

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fancy. Mere wit, as opposed to reason or argument, consists in striking out some casual and partial coincidence which has nothing to do, or at least implies no necessary connection with the nature of the things, which are forced into a seeming analogy by a play upon words, or some irrelevant conceit, as in puns, riddles, alliteration, &c. The jest, in all such cases, lies in the sort of mock-identity, or nominal resemblance, established by the intervention of the same words expressing different ideas, and countenancing, as it were, by a fatality of language, the mischievous insinuation which the person who has the wit to take advantage of it wishes to convey. So when the disaffected French wits applied to the new order of the *Fleur du lys* the *double entendre* of *Compagnons d'Ulysse*, or companions of Ulysses, meaning the animal into which the fellow-travellers of the Hero of the Odyssey were transformed, this was a shrewd and biting intimation of a galling truth (if truth it were) by a fortuitous concourse of letters of the alphabet, jumping in "a foregone conclusion," but there was no proof of the thing, unless it was self-evident. And, indeed, this may be considered as the best defence of the contested maxim, that *ridicule is the test of truth*; viz. that it does not contain or attempt a formal proof of it, but owes its power of conviction to the bare suggestion of it, so that if the thing when once hinted is not clear in itself, the satire fails of its effect and falls to the ground. The sarcasm here glanced at the character of the new or old French noblesse may not be well-founded; but it is so like truth, and "comes in such a questionable shape," backed with the appearance of an identical proposition, that it would require a long train of facts and laboured arguments to do away the impression, even if we were sure of the honesty and wisdom of the person who undertook to refute it. A flippant jest is as good a test of truth as a solid bribe; and there are serious sophistries,

"Soul-killing lies, and truths that work small good,"

as well as idle pleasantries. Of this we may be sure, that ridicule fastens on the vulnerable points of a cause, and finds out the weak sides of an argument; if those who resort to it sometimes rely too much on its success, those who are chiefly annoy-

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ed by it almost always are so with reason, and cannot be too much on their guard against deserving it. Before we can laugh at a thing, its absurdity must at least be open and palpable to common apprehension. Ridicule is necessarily built on certain supposed facts, whether true or false, and on their inconsistency with certain acknowledged maxims, whether right or wrong. It is, therefore, a fair test, if not a philosophical or abstract truth, at least of what is truth according to public opinion and common sense; for it can only expose to instantaneous contempt that which is condemned by public opinion, and is hostile to the common sense of mankind. Or, to put it differently, it is the test of the quantity of truth that there is in our favourite prejudices. To show how nearly allied wit is thought to be to truth, it is not unusual to say of any person—"Such a one is a man of sense, for though he said nothing, he laughed in the right place."—Alliteration comes in here under the head of a certain sort of verbal wit; or, by pointing the expression, sometimes points the sense. Mr. Grattan's wit or eloquence (I don't know by what name to call it) would be nothing without this accompaniment. Speaking of some ministers whom he did not like, he said, "Their only means of government are the guinea and the gallows." There can scarcely, it must be confessed, be a more effectual mode of political conversion than one of these applied to a man's friends, and the other to himself. The fine sarcasm of Junius on the effect of the supposed ingratitude of the Duke of Grafton at court—"The instance might be painful, but the principle would please"—notwithstanding the profound insight into human nature it implies, would hardly pass for wit without the alliteration, as some poetry would hardly be acknowledged as such without the rhyme to clench it. A quotation or a hackneyed phrase, dexterously turned or wrested to another purpose, has often the effect of the liveliest wit. An idle fellow who had only fourpence left in the world, which had been put by to pay for the baking some meat for his dinner, went and laid it out to buy a new string for a guitar. An old acquaintance, on hearing this story, repeated those lines out of the 'Allegro'—

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"And ever against eating cares
Lap me in soft Lydian airs."

The reply of the author of the periodical paper called the 'World' to a lady at church, who seeing him look thoughtful, asked what he was thinking of—"The next World,"—is a perversion of an established formula of language, something of the same kind.—Rhymes are sometimes a species of wit, where there is an alternate combination and resolution or decomposition of the elements of sound, contrary to our usual division and classification of them in ordinary speech, not unlike the sudden separation and re-union of the component parts of the machinery in a pantomime. The author who excels infinitely the most in this way is the writer of 'Hudibras.' He also excels in the invention of single words and names, which have the effect of wit by sounding big, and meaning nothing:—"full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." But of the artifices of this author's burlesque style I shall have occasion to speak hereafter.—It is not always easy to distinguish between the wit of words and that of things, "For thin partitions do their bounds divide." Some of the late Mr. Curran's *bon mots*, or *jeux d'esprit*, might be said to owe their birth to this sort of equivocal generation; or were a happy mixture of verbal wit and a lively and picturesque fancy, of legal acuteness in detecting the variable applications of words, and of a mind apt at perceiving the ludicrous in external objects. "Do you see any thing ridiculous in this wig?" said one of his brother judges to him. "Nothing but the head," was the answer. Now here instantaneous advantage was taken of the slight technical ambiguity in the construction of language, and the matter-of-fact is flung into the scale as a thumping makeweight. After all, verbal and accidental strokes of wit, though the most surprising and laughable, are not the best and most lasting. That wit is the most refined and effectual, which is founded on the detection of unexpected likeness or distinction in things, rather than in words. It is more severe and galling, that is, it is more unpardonable though less surprising, in proportion as the thought suggested is more complete and satisfactory, from its being inherent in the nature of

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the things themselves. *Hæret lateri lethalis arundo.* Truth makes the greatest libel, and it is that which barbs the darts of wit. The Duke of Buckingham's saying, "Laws are not, like women, the worse for being old," is an instance of a harmless truism and the utmost malice of wit united. This is, perhaps, what has been meant by the distinction between true and false wit. Mr. Addison, indeed, goes so far as to make it the exclusive test of true wit that it will bear translation into another language, that is to say, that it does not depend at all on the form of expression. But this is by no means the case. Swift would hardly have allowed of such a strait-laced theory, to make havoc with his darling conundrums; though there is no one whose serious wit is more that of things, as opposed to a mere play either of words or fancy. I ought, I believe, to have noticed before, in speaking of the difference between wit and humour, that wit is often pretended absurdity, where the person overacts or exaggerates a certain part with a conscious design to expose it as if it were another person, as when Mandrake in the Twin Rivals says, "This glass is too big, carry it away, I'll drink out of the bottle." On the contrary, when Sir Hugh Evans says very innocently, "'Od's plessed will, I will not be absent at the grace," though there is here a great deal of humour, there is no wit. This kind of wit of the humourist, where the person makes a butt of himself, and exhibits his own absurdities or foibles purposely in the most pointed and glaring lights, runs through the whole of the character of Falstaff, and is, in truth, the principle on which it is founded. It is an irony directed against oneself. Wit is, in fact, a voluntary act of the mind, or exercise of the invention, showing the absurd and ludicrous consciously, whether in ourselves or another. Cross-readings, where the blunders are designed, are wit; but if any one were to light upon them through ignorance or accident, they would be merely ludicrous.

It might be made an argument of the intrinsic superiority of poetry or imagination to wit, that the former does not admit of mere verbal combinations. Whenever they do occur, they are uniformly blemishes. It requires something more solid and substantial to raise admiration or passion. The general forms

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and aggregate masses of our ideas must be brought more into play, to give weight and magnitude. Imagination may be said to be the finding out something similar in things generally alike, or with like feelings attached to them, while wit principally aims at finding out something that seems the same, or amounts to a momentary deception where you least expected it, viz. in things totally opposite. The reason why more slight and partial, or merely accidental and nominal resemblances, serve the purposes of wit, and indeed characterise its essence as a distinct operation and faculty of the mind, is, that the object of ludicrous poetry is naturally to let down and lessen; and it is easier to let down than to raise up; to weaken than to strengthen; to disconnect our sympathy from passion and power, than to attach and rivet it to any object of grandeur or interest; to startle and shock our preconceptions, by incongruous and equivocal combinations, than to confirm, enforce, and expand them by powerful and lasting associations of ideas, or striking and true analogies. A slight cause is sufficient to produce a slight effect. To be indifferent or sceptical, requires no effort; to be enthusiastic and in earnest, requires a strong impulse, and collective power. Wit and humour (comparatively speaking, or taking the extremes to judge of the gradations by) appeal to our indolence, our vanity, our weakness, and insensibility; serious and impassioned poetry appeals to our strength, our magnanimity, our virtue, and humanity. Anything is sufficient to heap contempt upon an object; even the bare suggestion of a mischievous allusion to what is improper, dissolves the whole charm, and puts an end to our admiration of the sublime or beautiful. Reading the finest passage in Milton's 'Paradise Lost' in a false tone, will make it seem insipid and absurd. The cavilling at, or invidiously pointing out, a few slips of the pen, will embitter the pleasure, or alter our opinion of a whole work, and make us throw it down in disgust. The critics are aware of this vice and infirmity in our nature, and play upon it with periodical success. The meanest weapons are strong enough for this kind of warfare, and the meanest hands can wield them. Spleen can subsist on any kind of food. The shadow of a doubt, the hint of an inconsistency a word, a look, a syllable, will destroy our

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best-formed convictions. What puts this argument in as striking a point of view as anything, is the nature of parody or burlesque, the secret of which lies merely in transposing or applying at a venture to anything, or to the lowest objects, that which is applicable only to certain given things, or to the highest matters. "From the sublime to the ridiculous, there is but one step." The slightest want of unity of impression destroys the sublime; the detection of the smallest incongruity is an infallible ground to rest the ludicrous upon. But in serious poetry, which aims at rivetting our affections, every blow must tell home. The missing a single time is fatal, and undoes the spell. We see how difficult it is to sustain a continued flight of impressive sentiment: how easy it must be then to travestie or burlesque it, to flounder into nonsense, and be witty by playing the fool. It is a common mistake, however, to suppose that parodies degrade, or imply a stigma on the subject: on the contrary, they in general imply something serious or sacred in the originals. Without this, they would be good for nothing; for the immediate contrast would be wanting, and with this they are sure to tell. The best parodies are, accordingly, the best and most striking things reversed. Witness the common travesties of Homer and Virgil. Mr. Canning's court parodies on Mr. Southey's popular odes are also an instance in point (I do not know which were the cleverest;) and the best of the 'Rejected Addresses' is the parody on Crabbe, though I do not certainly think that Crabbe is the most ridiculous poet now living.

Lear and the Fool are the sublimest instance I know of passion and wit united, or of imagination unfolding the most tremendous sufferings, and of burlesque on passion playing with it, aiding and relieving its intensity by the most pointed, but familiar and indifferent illustrations of the same thing in different objects, and on a meaner scale. The Fool's reproaching Lear with "making his daughters his mothers," his snatches of proverbs and old ballads, "The hedge-sparrow fed the cuckoo so long, that it had its head bit off by its young," and "Whoop jug, I know when the horse follows the cart," are a running commentary of trite truisms, pointing out the extreme folly of

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the infatuated old monarch, and in a manner reconciling us to its inevitable consequences.

Lastly, there is a wit of sense and observation, which consists in the acute illustration of good sense and practical wisdom by means of some far-fetched conceit or quaint imagery. The matter is sense, but the form is wit. Thus the lines in Pope—

> "'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
> Go just alike; yet each believes his own—"

are witty rather than poetical; because the truth they convey is a mere dry observation on human life, without elevation or enthusiasm, and the illustration of it is of that quaint and familiar kind that is merely curious and fanciful. Cowley is an instance of the same kind in almost all his writings. Many of the jests and witticisms in the best comedies are moral aphorisms and rules for the conduct of life, sparkling with wit and fancy in the mode of expression. The ancient philosophers also abounded in the same kind of wit, in telling home truths in the most unexpected manner.—In this sense Æsop was the greatest wit and moralist that ever lived. Ape and slave, he looked askance at human nature, and beheld its weaknesses and errors transferred to another species. Vice and virtue were to him as plain as any objects of sense. He saw in man a talking, absurd, obstinate, proud, angry animal; and clothed these abstractions with wings, or a beak, or tail, or claws, or long ears, as they appeared embodied in these hieroglyphics in the brute creation. His moral philosophy is natural history. He makes an ass bray wisdom, and a frog croak humanity. The store of moral truth, and the fund of invention in exhibiting it in eternal forms, palpable and intelligible, and delightful to children and grown persons, and to all ages and nations, are almost miraculous. The invention of a fable is to me the most enviable exertion of human genius: it is the discovering a truth to which there is no clue, and which, when once found out, can never be forgotten. I would rather have been the author of 'Æsop's Fables' than of 'Euclid's Elements!' That popular entertainment, Punch and the Puppet-show, owes part of its irresistible and universal attraction to nearly the same principle of inspiring

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inanimate and mechanical agents with sense and consciousness The drollery and wit of a piece of wood is doubly droll and far cical. Punch is not merry in himself, but "he is the cause of heartfelt mirth in other men." The wires and pulleys that govern his motions are conductors to carry off the spleen, and all "that perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart." If we see a number of people turning the corner of a street, ready to burst with secret satisfaction, and with their faces bathed in laughter, we know what is the matter—that they are just come from a puppet-show. Who can see three little painted, patched-up figures, no bigger than one's thumb, strut, squeak, and gibber, sing, dance, chatter, scold, knock one another about the head, give themselves airs of importance, and "imitate humanity most abominably," without laughing immoderately? We overlook the farce and mummery of human life in little, and for nothing; and what is still better, it costs them who have to play in it nothing. We place the mirth, and glee, and triumph, to our own account; and we know that the bangs and blows they have received go for nothing, as soon as the showman puts them up in his box and marches off quietly with them, as jugglers of a less amusing description sometimes march off with the wrongs and rights of mankind in their pockets! I have heard no bad judge of such matters say, that "he liked a comedy better than a tragedy, a farce better than a comedy, a pantomime better than a farce, but a puppet-show best of all." I look upon it, that he who invented puppet-shows was a greater benefactor to his species, than he who invented Operas!

I shall conclude this imperfect and desultory sketch of wit and humour with Barrow's celebrated description of the same subject. He says, "—But first it may be demanded, what the thing we speak of is, or what this facetiousness doth import; to which question I might reply, as Democritus did to him that asked the definition of a man—*'tis that which we all see and know;* and one better apprehends what it is by acquaintance than I can inform him by description. It is, indeed, a thing so versatile and multiform, appearing in so many shapes, so many postures, so many garbs, so variously apprehended by several eyes and judgments, that it seemeth no less hard to settle a clear and certain

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notice thereof, than to make a portrait of Proteus, or to define the figure of fleeting air. Sometimes it lieth in pat allusion to a known story, or in seasonable application of a trivial saying, or in forging an apposite tale; sometimes it playeth in words and phrases, taking advantage from the ambiguity of their sense, or the affinity of their sound; sometimes it is wrapped in a dress of luminous expression; sometimes it lurketh under an odd similitude. Sometimes it is lodged in a sly question, in a smart answer; in a quirkish reason; in a shrewd intimation; in cunningly diverting or cleverly restoring an objection: sometimes it is couched in a bold scheme of speech; in a tart irony; in a lusty hyperbole; in a startling metaphor; in a plausible reconciling of contradictions, or in acute nonsense: sometimes a scenical representation of persons or things, a counterfeit speech, a mimical look or gesture passeth for it; sometimes an affected simplicity, sometimes a presumptuous bluntness giveth it being; sometimes it riseth only from a lucky hitting upon what is strange; sometimes from a crafty wresting obvious matter to the purpose; often it consisteth in one knows not what, and springeth up one can hardly tell how. Its ways are unaccountable and inexplicable, being answerable to the numberless rovings of fancy and windings of language. It is, in short, a manner of speaking out of the simple and plain way (such as reason teacheth and knoweth things by,) which by a pretty surprising uncouthness in conceit or expression doth affect and amuse the fancy, showing in it some wonder, and breathing some delight thereto. It raiseth admiration, as signifying a nimble sagacity of apprehension, a special felicity of invention, a vivacity of spirit, and reach of wit more than vulgar: it seeming to argue a rare quickness of parts, that one can fetch in remote conceits applicable; a notable skill that he can dextrously accommodate them to a purpose before him, together with a lively briskness of humour, not apt to damp those sportful flashes of imagination. (Whence in Aristotle such persons are termed ευτράπελοι, dexterous men, and ευτροποι, men of facile or versatile manners, who can easily turn themselves to all things, or turn all things to themselves.) It also procureth delight by gratifying curiosity with its rareness or semblance of difficulty (as monsters, not for their beauty but

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their rarity; as juggling tricks, not for their use but their abstruseness, are beheld with pleasure;) by diverting the mind from its road of serious thoughts; by instilling gaiety and airiness of spirit; by provoking to such dispositions of spirit, in way of emulation of complaisance, and by seasoning matter, otherwise distasteful or insipid, with an unusual and thence grateful tang."—*Barrow's Works, Serm.* 14.

I will only add, by way of general caution, that there is nothing more ridiculous than laughter without a cause, nor anything more troublesome than what are called laughing people. A professed laugher is as contemptible and tiresome a character as a professed wit: the one is always contriving something to laugh at, the other is always laughing at nothing. An excess of levity is as impertinent as an excess of gravity. A character of this sort is well personified by Spenser, in the 'Damsel of the Idle Lake'—

> "——— who did assay
> To laugh at shaking of the leavés light."

Any one must be mainly ignorant or thoughtless, who is surprised at everything he sees; or wonderfully conceited, who expects everything to conform to his standard of propriety. Clowns and idiots laugh on all occasions; and the common failing of wishing to be thought satirical often runs through whole families in country places, to the great annoyance of their neighbours. To be struck with incongruity in whatever comes before us, does not argue great comprehension or refinement of perception, but rather a looseness and flippancy of mind and temper, which prevents the individual from connecting any two ideas steadily or consistently together. It is owing to a natural crudity and precipitateness of the imagination, which assimilates nothing properly to itself. People who are always laughing, at length laugh on the wrong side of their faces; for they cannot get others to laugh with them. In like manner, an affectation of wit by degrees hardens the heart, and spoils good company and good manners. A perpetual succession of good things puts an end to common conversation. There is no answer to a jest, but another; and even where the ball can be kept up in this way without ceasing, it tires the patience of the by-standers,

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and runs the speakers out of breath. Wit is the salt of conversation, not the food.

The four chief names for comic humour out of our own language are Aristophanes and Lucian among the ancients, Molière and Rabelais among the moderns. Of the two first I shall say, for I know but little. I should have liked Aristophanes better if he had treated Socrates less scurvily, for he has treated him most scurvily both as to wit and argument. His Plutus and his Birds are striking instances, the one of dry humour, the other of airy fancy.—Lucian is a writer who appears to deserve his full fame: he has the licentious and extravagant wit of Rabelais, but directed more uniformly to a purpose; and his comic productions are interspersed with beautiful and eloquent descriptions, full of sentiment, such as the exquisite account of the fable of the halcyon put into the mouth of Socrates, and the heroic eulogy on Bacchus, which is conceived in the highest strain of glowing panegyric.

The two other authors I proposed to mention are modern, and French. Molière, however, in the spirit of his writings, is almost as much an English as a French author—quite a *barbare* in all in which he really excelled. He was unquestionably one of the greatest comic geniuses that ever lived; a man of infinite wit, gaiety, and invention—full of life, laughter, and whim. But it cannot be denied that his plays are in general mere farces, without scrupulous adherence to nature, refinement of character, or common probability. The plots of several of them could not be carried on for a moment without a perfect collusion between the parties to wink at contradictions, and act in defiance of the evidence of their senses. For instance, take the '*Medecin malgré lui*' ('The Mock Doctor,') in which a common wood-cutter takes upon himself, and is made successfully to support through a whole play, the character of a learned physician, without exciting the least suspicion; and yet notwithstanding the absurdity of the plot, it is one of the most laughable and truly comic productions that can well be imagined. The rest of his lighter pieces, the '*Bourgeois Gentilhomme*,' '*Monsieur Pourceaugnac*,' *George* '*Dandin*,' (or 'Barnaby Brittle,') &c. are of the same description—gratuitous assumptions of character, and fanciful and out-

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rageous caricatures of nature. He indulges at his peril in the utmost license of burlesque exaggeration; and gives a loose to the intoxication of his animal spirits. With respect to his two most laboured comedies, the 'Tartuffe' and 'Misanthrope,' I confess that I find them rather hard to get through: they have much of the improbability and extravagance of the others, united with the endless common-place prosing of French declamation. What can exceed, for example, the absurdity of the 'Misanthrope,' who leaves his mistress, after every proof of her attachment and constancy, for no other reason than that she will not submit to the *technical formality* of going to live with him in a wilderness? The characters, again, which Celimene gives of her female friends, near the opening of the play, are admirable satires, (as good as Pope's characters of women,) but not exactly in the spirit of comic dialogue. The strictures of Rousseau on this play, in his 'Letter to D'Alembert,' are a fine specimen of the best philosophical criticism.—The same remarks apply in a greater degree to the 'Tartuffe.' The long speeches and reasonings in this play tire one almost to death: they may be very good logic, or rhetoric, or philosophy, or anything but comedy. If each of the parties had retained a special pleader to speak his sentiments, they could not have appeared more verbose or intricate. The improbability of the character of Orgon is wonderful. This play is in one point of view invaluable, as a lasting monument of the credulity of the French to all verbal professions of wisdom or virtue; and its existence can only be accounted for from that astonishing and tyrannical predominance which words exercise over things in the mind of every Frenchman. The '*Ecole des Femmes*,' from which Wycherley has borrowed his 'Country Wife,' with the true spirit of original genius, is, in my judgment, the master-piece of Molière. The set speeches in the original play, it is true, would not be borne on the English stage, nor indeed on the French, but that they are carried off by the verse. The '*Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*,' the dialogue of which is prose, is written in a very different style. Among other things, this little piece contains an exquisite, and almost unanswerable defence of the superiority of comedy over tragedy. Molière was to be excused for taking this side of the question.

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A writer of some pretensions among ourselves has reproached the French with "an equal want of books and men." There is a common French print, in which Molière is represented reading one of his plays in the presence of the celebrated Ninon de l'Enclos, to a circle of the wits and first men of his own time. Among these are the great Corneille; the tender, faultless Racine; Fontaine, the artless old man, unconscious of immortality; the accomplished St. Evremond; the Duke de la Rochefoucault, the severe anatomiser of the human breast; Boileau, the flatterer of courts and judge of men! Were these men nothing? they have passed for men (and great ones) hitherto, and though the prejudice is an old one, I should hope it may still last our time.

Rabelais is another name that might have saved this unjust censure. The wise sayings and heroic deeds of Gargantua and Pantagruel ought not to be set down as nothing. I have already spoken my mind at large of this author; but I cannot help thinking of him here, sitting in his easy chair, with an eye languid with excess of mirth, his lip quivering with a new-born conceit, and wiping his beard after a well-seasoned jest, with his pen held carelessly in his hand, his wine-flagons, and his books of law, of school divinity, and physic before him, which were his jest-books, whence he drew endless stores of absurdity; laughing at the world and enjoying it by turns, and making the world laugh with him again, for the last three hundred years, at his teeming wit and its own prolific follies. Even to those who have never read his works, the name of Rabelais is a cordial to the spirits, and the mention of it cannot consist with gravity or spleen!

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LECTURE II.

On Shakspeare and Ben Jonson.

Dr. Johnson thought Shakspeare's comedies better than his tragedies, and gives as a reason, that he was more at home in the one than in the other. That comedies should be written in a more easy and careless vein than tragedies, is but natural. This is only saying that a comedy is not so serious a thing as a tragedy. But that he showed a greater mastery in the one than in the other, I cannot allow, nor is it generally felt. The labour which the Doctor thought it cost Shakspeare to write his tragedies, only showed the labour which it cost the critic in reading them, that is, his general indisposition to sympathise heartily and spontaneously with works of high-wrought passion or imagination. There is not in any part of this author's writings the slightest trace of his ever having been "smit with the love of sacred song," except some passages in Pope. His habitually morbid temperament and saturnine turn of thought required that the string should rather be relaxed than tightened, that the weight upon the mind should rather be taken off than have anything added to it. There was a sluggish moroseness about his moral constitution that refused to be roused to any keen agony of thought, and that was not very safely to be trifled with in lighter matters, though this last was allowed to pass off as the most pardonable offence against the gravity of his pretensions. It is in fact the established rule at present, in these cases, to speak highly of the Doctor's authority, and to dissent from almost every one of his critical decisions. For my own part, I so far consider this preference given to the comic genius of the poet as erroneous and unfounded, that I should say that he is the only tragic poet in the world in the highest sense, as being on a par with, and the same as Nature, in her greatest heights and depth

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of action and suffering. There is but one who durst walk within that mighty circle, treading the utmost bound of nature and passion, showing us the dread abyss of woe in all its ghastly shapes and colours, and laying open all the faculties of the human soul to act, to think, and suffer, in direst extremities; whereas, I think, on the other hand, that in comedy, though his talents there too were as wonderful as they were delightful, yet that there were some before him, others on a level with him, and many close behind him. I cannot help thinking, for instance, that Molière was as great, or a greater comic genius than Shakspeare, though assuredly I do not think that Racine was as great, or a greater tragic genius. I think that both Rabelais and Cervantes, the one in the power of ludicrous description, the other in the invention and perfect keeping of comic character, excelled Shakspeare; that is, they would have been greater men, if they had had equal power with him over the stronger passions. For my own reading, I like Vanbrugh's 'City Wives' Confederacy' as well, or ("not to speak it profanely") better than the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' and Congreve's 'Way of the World' as well as the 'Comedy of Errors' or 'Love's Labour Lost.' But I cannot say that I know of any tragedies in the world that make even a tolerable approach to 'Hamlet,' or 'Lear,' or 'Othello,' or some others, either in the sum total of their effect, or in their complete distinctness from everything else, by which they take not only unquestioned, but undivided possession of the mind, and form a class, a world by themselves mingling with all our thoughts like a second being. Other tragedies tell for more or less, are good, bad, or indifferent, as they have more or less excellence of a kind common to them with others: but these stand alone by themselves; they have nothing common-place in them; they are a new power in the imagination, they tell for their whole amount, they measure from the ground. There is not only nothing so good (in my judgment) as 'Hamlet,' or 'Lear,' or 'Othello,' or 'Macbeth,' but there is nothing like 'Hamlet,' or 'Lear,' or 'Othello,' or 'Macbeth.' There is nothing, I believe, in the majestic Corneille, equal to the stern pride of 'Coriolanus;' or which gives such an idea of the crumbling in pieces of the Roman grandeur, "like an unsubstantial

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pageant faded," as the 'Antony and Cleopatra.' But to match the best serious comedies, such as Molière's 'Misanthrope' and his 'Tartuffe,' we must go to Shakspeare's tragic characters, the Timon of Athens or honest Iago, when we shall more than succeed. He put his strength into his tragedies, and played with comedy. He was greatest in what was greatest; and his *forte* was not trifling, according to the opinion here combated, even though he might do that as well as anybody else, unless he could do it better than anybody else. I would not be understood to say that there are not scenes or whole characters in Shakspeare equal in wit and drollery to anything upon record. Falstaff alone is an instance which, if I would, I could not get over. "He is the leviathan of all the creatures of the author's comic genius, and tumbles about his unwieldy bulk in an ocean of wit and humour." But in general it will be found (if I am not mistaken,) that even in the very best of these the spirit of humanity and the fancy of the poet greatly prevail over the mere wit and satire, and that we sympathise with his characters oftener than we laugh at them. His ridicule wants the sting of ill-nature. He had hardly such a thing as spleen in his composition. Falstaff himself is so great a joke, rather from his being so huge a mass of enjoyment than of absurdity. His re-appearance in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor' is not "a consummation devoutly to be wished," for we do not take pleasure in the repeated triumphs over him. Mercutio's quips and banter upon his friends show amazing gaiety, frankness, and volubility of tongue, but we think no more of them when the poet takes the words out of his mouth, and gives the description of Queen Mab. Touchstone, again, is a shrewd biting fellow, a lively, mischievous wag; but still what are his gibing sentences and chopped logic to the fine moralising vein of the fantastical Jaques, stretched beneath "the shade of melancholy boughs?" Nothing. That is, Shakspeare was a greater poet than wit; his imagination was the leading and master-quality of his mind, which was always ready to soar into its native element: the ludicrous was only secondary and subordinate. In the comedies of gallantry and intrigue, with what freshness and delight we come to the serious and romantic parts! What a relief they are to the mind, after

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those of mere ribaldry or mirth! Those in the 'Twelfth Night,' for instance, and 'Much Ado about Nothing,' where Olivia and Hero are concerned, throw even Malvolio and Sir Toby, and Benedick and Beatrice, into the shade. They "give a very echo to the seat where love is throned." What he has said of music might be said of his own poetry—

> "Oh! it came o'er my ear like the sweet south
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odour."

How poor, in general, what a falling-off, these parts seem in mere comic authors; how ashamed we are of them; and how fast we hurry the blank verse over, that we may get upon safe ground again, and recover our good opinion of the author! A striking and lamentable instance of this may be found (by any one who chooses) in the high-flown speeches in Sir Richard Steele's 'Conscious Lovers.' As good an example as any of this informing and redeeming power in our author's genius might be taken from the comic scenes in both parts of Henry IV. Nothing can go much lower in intellect or morals than many of the characters. Here are knaves and fools in abundance, of the meanest order, and stripped stark-naked. But genius, like charity, "covers a multitude of sins;" we pity as much as we despise them; in spite of our disgust we like them, because they like themselves, and because we are made to sympathise with them; and the ligament, fine as it is, which links them to humanity, is never broken. Who would quarrel with Wart, or Feeble, or Mouldy, or Bull-calf, or even with Pistol, Nym, or Bardolph? None but a hypocrite. The severe censurers of the morals of imaginary characters can generally find a hole for their own vices to creep out at, and yet do not perceive how it is that the imperfect and even deformed characters in Shakspeare's plays, as done to the life, by forming a part of our personal consciousness, claim our personal forgiveness, and suspend or evade our moral judgment, by bribing our self love to side with them. Not to do so, is not morality, but affectation, stupidity, or ill-nature. I have more sympathy with one of Shakspeare's pick-purses, Gadshill or Peto, than I can possibly

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have with any member of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and would by no means assist to deliver the one into the hands of the other. Those who cannot be persuaded to draw a veil over the foibles of ideal characters, may be suspected of wearing a mask over their own! Again, in point of understanding and attainments, Shallow sinks low enough; and yet his cousin Silence is a foil to him; he is the shadow of a shade, glimmers on the very verge of downright imbecility, and totters on the brink of nothing. "He has been merry twice and once ere now," and is hardly persuaded to break his silence in a song. Shallow has "heard the chimes at midnight," and roared out glees and catches at taverns and inns of court, when he was young. So, at least, he tells his cousin Silence, and Falstaff encourages the loftiness of his pretensions. Shallow would be thought a great man among his dependents and followers; Silence is nobody—not even in his own opinion; yet he sits in the orchard, and eats his carraways and pippins among the rest. Shakspeare takes up the meanest subjects with the same tenderness that we do an insect's wing, and would not kill a fly. To give a more particular instance of what I mean, I will take the inimitable and affecting, though most absurd and ludicrous dialogue, between Shallow and Silence, on the death of old Double.

"*Shallow.* Come on, come on, come on; give me your hand, sir; give me your hand, sir; an early stirrer, by the rood. And how doth my good cousin Silence?

Silence. Good morrow, good cousin Shallow.

Shallow. And how doth my cousin, your bedfellow? and your fairest daughter, and mine, my god-daughter Ellen?

Silence. Alas, a black ouzel, cousin Shallow.

Shallow. By yea and nay, sir; I dare say, my cousin William is become a good scholar: he is at Oxford still, is he not?

Silence. Indeed, sir, to my cost.

Shallow. He must then to the inns of court shortly. I was once of Clement's inn; where, I think, they will talk of mad Shallow yet.

Silence. You were called lusty Shallow then, cousin.

Shallow. I was called anything, and I would have done anything indeed, and roundly too. There was I, and little John Doit, of Staffordshire, and black George Bare, and Francis Pickbone, and Will Squele, a Cotswold man, you had not four such swinge-bucklers in all the inns of court

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again; and, I may say to you, we knew where the bonarobas were, and had the best of them all at commandment. Then was Jack Falstaff, now Sir John, a boy, and page to Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk.

Silence. This Sir John, cousin, that comes hither anon about soldiers?

Shallow. The same Sir John, the very same: I saw him break Schoggan's head at the court-gate, when he was a crack, not thus high; and the very same day did I fight with one Sampson Stockfish, a fruiterer, behind Gray's inn. O, the mad days that I have spent! and to see how many of mine old acquaintances are dead!

Silence. We shall all follow, cousin.

Shallow. Certain, 'tis certain, very sure, very sure: death (as the Psalmist saith) is certain to all, all shall die—How a good yoke of bullocks at Stamford fair?

Silence. Truly, cousin, I was not there.

Shallow. Death is certain. Is old Double of your town living yet?

Silence. Dead, Sir.

Shallow. Dead! see, see! he drew a good bow; and dead? he shot a fine shoot. John of Gaunt loved him well, and betted much money on his head. Dead! he would have clapped i' th' clout at twelve score; and carried you a forehand shaft a fourteen and a half, that it would have done a man's heart good to see.—How a score of ewes now?

Silence. Thereafter as they be; a score of good ewes may be worth ten pounds.

Shallow. And is old Double dead?"

There is not anything more characteristic than this in all Shakspeare. A finer sermon on mortality was never preached. We see the frail condition of human life, and the weakness of the human understanding in Shallow's reflections on it; who, while the past is sliding from beneath his feet, still clings to the present. The meanest circumstances are shown through an atmosphere of abstraction that dignifies them; their very insignificance makes them more affecting, for they instantly put a check on our aspiring thoughts, and remind us that, seen through that dim perspective, the difference between the great and little, the wise and foolish, is not much. "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin:" and old Double, though his exploits had been greater, could but have had his day. There is a pathetic *naiveté* mixed up with Shallow's common-place reflections and impertinent digressions. The reader laughs (as well he may) in reading the passage, but he lays down the book to think. The wit, however diverting, is social and humane. But this is

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not the distinguishing characteristic of wit, which is generally provoked by folly, and spends its venom upon vice.

The fault, then, of Shakspeare's comic Muse is, in my opinion, that it is too good-natured and magnanimous. It mounts above its quarry. It is "apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery, and delectable shapes:" but it does not take the highest pleasure in making human nature look as mean, as ridiculous, and contemptible as possible. It is in this respect, chiefly, that it differs from the comedy of a later, and (what is called) a more refined period. Genteel comedy is the comedy of fashionable life, and of artificial character and manners. The most pungent ridicule is that which is directed to mortify vanity, and to expose affectation; but vanity and affectation, in their most exorbitant and studied excesses, are the ruling principles of society, only in a highly advanced state of civilization and manners. Man can hardly be said to be a truly contemptible animal, till, from the facilities of general intercourse, and the progress of example and opinion, he becomes the ape of the extravagances of other men. The keenest edge of satire is required to distinguish between the true and false pretensions to taste and elegance; its lash is laid on with the utmost severity, to drive before it the common herd of knaves and fools, not to lacerate and terrify the single stragglers. In a word, it is when folly is epidemic, and vice worn as a mark of distinction, that all the malice of wit and humour is called out and justified to detect the imposture, and prevent the contagion from spreading. The fools in Wycherley and Congreve are of their own, or one another's making, and deserve to be well scourged into common sense and decency: the fools in Shakspeare are of his own or nature's making; and it would be unfair to probe to the quick, or hold up to unqualified derision, the faults which are involuntary and incorrigible, or those which you yourself encourage and exaggerate, from the pleasure you take in witnessing them. Our later comic writers represent a state of manners, in which to be a man of wit and pleasure about town was become the fashion, and in which the swarms of egregious pretenders in both kinds openly kept one another in countenance, and were become a public nuisance. Shakspeare, living in a

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state of greater rudeness and simplicity, chiefly gave certain characters which were a kind of *grotesques*, or solitary excrescences growing up out of their native soil without affectation, and which he undertook kindly to pamper for the public entertainment. For instance, Sir Andrew Aguecheek is evidently a creature of the poet's own fancy. The author lends occasion to his absurdity to show itself as much as he pleases, devises antics for him which would not enter into his own head, makes him "go to church in a galliard, and return home in a coranto;" adds fuel to his folly, or throws cold water on his courage; makes his puny extravagance venture out or slink into corners without asking his leave; encourages them into indiscreet luxuriance, or checks them in the bud, just as it suits him for the jest's sake. The gratification of the fancy, "and furnishing matter for innocent mirth," are, therefore, the chief object of this and other characters like it, rather than reforming the moral sense, or indulging our personal spleen. But Tattle and Sparkish, who are fops cast not in the mould of fancy, but of fashion, who have a tribe of forerunners and followers, who catch certain diseases of the mind on purpose to communicate the infection, and are screened in their preposterous eccentricities by their own conceit and by the world's opinion, are entitled to no quarter, and receive none. They think themselves objects of envy and admiration, and on that account are doubly objects of our contempt and ridicule.—We find that the scenes of Shakspeare's comedies are mostly laid in the country, or are transferable there at pleasure. The genteel comedy exists only in towns, and crowds of borrowed characters, who copy others as the satirist copies them, and who are only seen to be despised. "All beyond Hyde Park is a desert" to it: while there the pastoral and poetic comedy begins to vegetate and flourish, unpruned, idle, and fantastic. It is hard to "lay waste a country gentleman" in a state of nature, whose humours may have run a little wild or to seed, or to lay violent hands on a young booby 'squire, whose absurdities have not yet arrived at years of discretion: but my Lord Foppington, who is "the prince of coxcombs," and "proud of being at the head of so prevailing a party," deserves his fate. I am not for going so far as to pronounce Shak-

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speare's "manners damnable, because he had not seen the court;" but I think that comedy does not find its richest harvest till individual infirmities have passed into general manners, and it is the example of courts, chiefly, that stamps folly with credit and currency, or glosses over vice with meretricious lustre. I conceive, therefore, that the golden period of our comedy was just after the age of Charles II., when the town first became tainted with the affectation of the manners and conversation of fashionable life, and before the distinction between rusticity and elegance, art and nature, was lost (as it afterwards was) in a general diffusion of knowledge, and the reciprocal advantages of civil intercourse. It is to be remarked, that the union of the three gradations of artificial elegance and courtly accomplishments in one class, of the affectation of them in another, and of absolute rusticity in a third, forms the highest point of perfection of the comedies of this period, as we may see in Vanbrugh's Lord Foppington, Sir Tunbelly Clumsy, and Miss Hoyden; Lady Townly, Count Basset, and John Moody; in Congreve's Millamant, Lady Wishfort, Witwoud, Sir Wilful Witwoud, and the rest.

In another point of view, or with respect to that part of comedy which relates to gallantry and intrigue, the difference between Shakspeare's comic heroines and those of a later period may be referred to the same distinction between natural and artificial life, between the world of fancy and the world of fashion. The refinements of romantic passion arise out of the imagination brooding over "airy nothing," or over a favourite object, where "love's golden shaft hath killed the flock of all affections else:" whereas the refinements of this passion in genteel comedy, or in every-day life, may be said to arise out of repeated observation and experience, diverting and frittering away the first impressions of things by a multiplicity of objects, and producing, not enthusiasm, but fastidiousness or giddy dissipation. For the one a comparatively rude age and strong feelings are best fitted; for "there the mind must minister to itself:" to the other, the progress of society and a knowledge of the world are essential; for here the effect does not depend on leaving the mind concentred in itself, but on the wear and tear of the heart, amidst the

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complex and rapid movements of the artificial machinery of society, and the arbitrary subjection of the natural course of the affections to every the slightest fluctuation of fashion, caprice, or opinion. Thus Olivia, in 'Twelfth Night,' has but one admirer of equal rank with herself, and but one love, to whom she innocently plights her hand and heart; or if she had a thousand lovers, she would be the sole object of their adoration and burning vows, without a rival. The heroine of romance and poetry sits secluded in the bowers of fancy, sole queen and arbitress of all hearts; and as the character is one of imagination, "of solitude and melancholy musing born," so it may be best drawn from the imagination. Millamant, in the 'Way of the World,' on the contrary, who is the fine lady or heroine of comedy, has so many lovers, that she surfeits on admiration, till it becomes indifferent to her; so many rivals, that she is forced to put on a thousand airs of languid affectation to mortify and vex them more; so many offers, that she at last gives her hand to the man of her heart, rather to escape the persecution of their addresses, and out of levity and disdain, than from any serious choice of her own. This is a comic character; its essence consists in making light of things from familiarity and use, and as it is formed by habit and outward circumstances, so it requires actual observation, and an acquaintance with the modes of artificial life, to describe it with the utmost possible grace and precision. Congreve, who had every other opportunity, was but a young man when he wrote this character; and that makes the miracle the greater.

I do not, in short, consider comedy as exactly an affair of the heart or the imagination; and it is for this reason only that I think Shakspeare's comedies deficient. I do not, however, wish to give a preference of any comedies over his; but I do perceive a difference between his comedies and some others that are, notwithstanding, excellent in their way, and I have endeavoured to point out in what this difference consists, as well as I could. Finally, I will not say that he had not as great a natural genius for comedy as any one; but I may venture to say, that he had not the same artificial models and regulated mass of fashionable absurdity or elegance to work upon.

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The superiority of Shakspeare's natural genius for comedy cannot be better shown than by a comparison between his comic characters and those of Ben Jonson. The matter is the same: but how different is the manner! The one gives fair-play to nature and his own genius, while the other trusts almost entirely to imitation and custom. Shakspeare takes his groundwork in individual character and the manners of his age, and raises from them a fantastical and delightful superstructure of his own: the other takes the same groundwork in matter-of-fact, but hardly ever rises above it; and the more he strives, is but the more enveloped "in the crust of formality" and the crude circumstantials of his subject. His genius (not to profane an old and still venerable name, but merely to make myself understood) resembles the grub more than the butterfly, plods and grovels on, wants wings to wanton in the idle summer's air, and catch the golden light of poetry. Ben Jonson is a great borrower from the works of others, and a plagiarist even from nature; so little freedom is there in his imitations of her, and he appears to receive her bounty like an alms. His works read like translations, from a certain cramp manner, and want of adaptation. Shakspeare, even when he takes whole passages from books, does it with a spirit, felicity, and mastery over his subject, that instantly makes them his own; and shows more independence of mind and original thinking in what he plunders without scruple, than Ben Jonson often did in his most studied passages, forced from the sweat and labour of his brain. His style is as dry, as literal, and meagre, as Shakspeare's is exuberant, liberal, and unrestrained. The one labours hard, lashes himself up, and produces little pleasure with all his fidelity and tenaciousness of purpose: the other, without putting himself to any trouble, or thinking about his success, performs wonders,—

> "Does mad and frantic execution,
> Engaging and redeeming of himself,
> With such a careless force and forceless* care,
> As if that luck, in very spite of cunning,
> Bad him win all."

* Unforced.

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There are people who cannot taste olives—and I cannot much relish Ben Jonson, though I have taken some pains to do it, and went to the task with every sort of good will. I do not deny his power or his merit; far from it: but it is to me a repulsive and unamiable kind. He was a great man in himself, but one cannot readily sympathize with him. His works, as the characteristic productions of an individual mind, or as records of the manners of a particular age, cannot be valued too highly; but they have little charm for the mere general reader. Schlegel observes, that whereas Shakspeare gives the springs of human nature, which are always the same, or sufficiently so to be interesting and intelligible; Jonson chiefly gives the *humours* of men, as connected with certain arbitrary or conventional modes of dress, action, and expression, which are intelligible only while they last, and not very interesting at any time. Shakspeare's characters are men; Ben Jonson's are more like machines, governed by mere routine, or by the convenience of the poet, whose property they are. In reading the one, we are let into the minds of his characters, we see the play of their thoughts, how their humours flow and work: the author takes a range over nature, and has an eye to every object or occasion that presents itself to set off and heighten the ludicrous character he is describing. His humour (so to speak) bubbles, sparkles, and finds its way in all directions, like a natural spring. In Ben Jonson it is, as it were, confined in a leaden cistern, where it stagnates and corrupts; or directed only through certain artificial pipes and conduits to answer a given purpose. The comedy of this author is far from being "lively, audible, and full of vent:" it is for the most part obtuse, obscure, forced, and tedious. He wears out a jest to the last shred and coarsest grain. His imagination fastens instinctively on some one mark or sign by which he designates the individual, and never lets it go, for fear of not meeting with any other means to express himself by. A cant phrase, an odd gesture, an old-fashioned regimental uniform, a wooden leg, a tobacco-box, or a hacked sword, are the standing topics by which he embodies his characters to the imagination. They are cut and dried comedy; the letter, not the spirit of wit and humour. Each of his characters has a particular cue, a

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professional badge which he wears and is known by, and by nothing else. Thus there is no end of Captain Otter, his Bull, his Bear, and his Horse, which are no joke at first, and do not become so by being repeated twenty times. It is a mere matter of fact, that some landlord of his acquaintance called his drinking cups by these ridiculous names; but why need we be told so more than once, or indeed at all? There is almost a total want of variety, fancy, relief, and of those delightful transitions which abound, for instance, in Shakspeare's tragi-comedy. In Ben Jonson, we find ourselves generally in low company, and we see no hope of getting out of it. He is like a person who fastens upon a disagreeable subject, and cannot be persuaded to leave it. His comedy, in a word, has not what Shakspeare somewhere calls "bless'd conditions." It is cross-grained, mean, and mechanical. It is handicraft wit. Squalid poverty, sheer ignorance, bare-faced impudence, or idiot imbecility, are his dramatic common-places—things that provoke pity or disgust, instead of laughter. His portraits are caricatures by dint of their very likeness, being extravagant tautologies of themselves; as his plots are improbable by an excess of consistency; for he goes thorough-stitch with whatever he takes in hand, makes one contrivance answer all purposes, and every obstacle give way to a predetermined theory. For instance, nothing can be more incredible than the mercenary conduct of Corvino, in delivering up his wife to the palsied embraces of Volpone; and yet the poet does not seem in the least to boggle at the incongruity of it: but the more it is in keeping with the absurdity of the rest of the fable, and the more it advances it to an incredible catastrophe, the more he seems to dwell upon it with complacency and a sort of wilful exaggeration, as if it were a logical discovery or corollary from well-known premises. He would no more be baffled in the working out a plot, than some people will be baffled in an argument. "If to be wise were to be obstinate," our uthor might have laid signal claim to this title. Old Ben was of a scholastic turn, and had dealt a little in the occult sciences and controversial divinity. He was a man of strong crabbed sense, retentive memory, acute observation, great fidelity of description and keeping in character, a power of working out an

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idea so as to make it painfully true and oppressive, and with great honesty and manliness of feeling, as well as directness of understanding: but with all this, he wanted, to my thinking, that genial spirit of enjoyment and finer fancy, which constitute the essence of poetry and of wit. The sense of reality exercised a despotic sway over his mind, and equally weighed down and clogged his perception of the beautiful or the ridiculous. He had a keen sense of what was true and false, but not of the difference between the agreeable and the disagreeable; or if he had, it was by his understanding rather than his imagination, by rule and method, not by sympathy, or intuitive perception of "the gayest, happiest attitude of things." There was nothing spontaneous, no impulse or ease about his genius: it was all forced, up-hill work, making a toil of a pleasure. And hence his overweening admiration of his own works, from the effort they had cost him, and the apprehension that they were not proportionably admired by others, who knew nothing of the pangs and throes of his Muse in child-bearing. In his satirical descriptions he seldom stops short of the lowest and most offensive point of meanness; and in his serious poetry he seems to repose with complacency only on the pedantic and far-fetched, the *ultima Thule* of his knowledge. He has a conscience of letting nothing escape the reader that he knows. *Aliquando sufflaminandus erat*, is as true of him as it was of Shakspeare, but in a quite different sense. He is doggedly bent upon fatiguing you with a favourite idea; whereas Shakspeare overpowers and distracts attention by the throng and indiscriminate variety of his. His 'Sad Shepherd' is a beautiful fragment. It was a favourite with the late Mr. Horne Tooke: indeed it is no wonder, for there was a sort of sympathy between the two men. Ben was like the modern wit and philosopher, a grammarian and a hard-headed thinker. There is an amusing account of Ben Jonson's private manners in 'Howel's Letters,' which is not generally known, and which I shall here extract.

"*From James Howel, Esq., to Sir Thomas Hawk, Kt.*

"Sir, Westminster, 5th April, 1636.

"I was invited yesternight to a solemn supper by B. J., where you were deeply remembered; there was good company, excellent cheer, choice

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wines, and jovial welcome: one thing intervened, which almost spoiled the relish of the rest, that B. began to engross all the discourse, to vapour extremely by himself, and, by vilifying others, to magnify his own Muse. T. Ca. (Tom Carew) buzzed me in the ear, that though Ben had barrelled up a great deal of knowledge, yet it seems he had not read the ethics, which, among other precepts of morality, forbid self-commendation, declaring it to be an ill-favoured solecism in good manners. It made me think upon the lady (not very young) who, having a good while given her guest neat entertainment, a capon being brought upon the table, instead of a spoon, she took a mouthful of claret, and spouted into the hollow bird: such an accident happened in this entertainment: you know—*propria, laus sordet in ore:* be a man's breath ever so sweet, yet it makes one's praise stink, if he makes his own mouth the conduit-pipe of it. But, for my part, I am content to dispense with the Roman infirmity of Ben, now that time hath snowed upon his pericranium. You know Ovid and (your) Horace were subject to this humour, the first bursting out into—

Jamque opus exegi, quod nec Jovis ira nec ignis, &c.

The other into—

Exegi monumentum ære perennius, &c.

As also Cicero, while he forced himself into this hexameter: *O fortunatum natam me consule Romam!* There is another reason that excuseth B., which is, that if one be allowed to love the natural issue of his body, why not that of the brain, which is of a spiritual and more noble extraction?"

The concurring testimony of all his contemporaries agrees with his own candid avowal, as to Ben Jonson's personal character. He begins, for instance, an epistle to Drayton in these words:—

"Michael, by some 'tis doubted if I be.
A friend at all; or, if a friend, to thee."

Of Shakspeare's comedies I have already given a detailed account, which is before the public, and which I shall not repeat of course; but I shall give a cursory sketch of the principal of Ben Jonson's. [It has been observed of this author, that he painted not so much human nature as temporary manners; not the characters of men, but their humours; that is to say, peculiarities of phrase, modes of dress, gesture, &c., which becoming obselete, and being in themselves altogether arbitrary and fantastical, have become unintelligible and uninteresting.] The Silent Woman is built upon the supposition of an old citizen disliking noise, who takes to wife Epicene (a supposed young lady)

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for the reputation of her silence, and with a view to disinherit his nephew, who has laughed at his infirmity; when the ceremony is no sooner over than the bride turns out a very shrew, his house becomes a very Babel of noises, and he offers his nephew his own terms to unloose the matrimonial knot, which is done by proving that Epicene is no woman. There is some humour in the leading character, but too much is made out of it, not in the way of Molière's exaggerations, which, though extravagant, are fantastical and ludicrous, but of serious, plodding, minute prolixity. The first meeting between Morose and Epicene is well managed, and does not "o'erstep the modesty of nature," from the very restraint imposed by the situation of the parties—by the affected taciturnity of the one, and the other's singular dislike of noise. The whole story, from the beginning to the end, is a gratuitous assumption, and the height of improbability. The author, in sustaining the weight of his plot, seems like a balance-master who supports a number of people, piled one upon another, on his hands, his knees, his shoulders, but with a great effort on his own part, and with a painful effect to the beholders. The scene between Sir Amorous La Fool and Sir John Daw, in which they are frightened, by a feigned report of each other's courage, into a submission to all sorts of indignities, which they construe into flattering civilities, is the same device as that in 'Twelfth Night' between Sir Andrew Ague-cheek and Viola, carried to a paradoxical and revolting excess. Ben Jonson had no idea of decorum in his dramatic fictions, which Milton says is the principal thing, but went on caricaturing himself and others till he could go no farther in extravagance, and sink no lower in meanness. The titles of his *dramatis personæ*, such as Sir Amorous La Fool, Truewit, Sir John Daw, Sir Politic Would-be, &c. &c., which are significant and knowing, show his determination to overdo everything by thus letting you into their characters beforehand, and afterwards proving their pretensions by their names. Thus Peregrine, in 'Volpone,' says, "Your name, Sir?" *Politick.* "My name is Politick Would-be." To which Peregrine replies, "Oh, that speaks him." How it should, if it was his real name, and not a nickname given him on purpose by the author, is hard to con-

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ceive. This play was Dryden's favourite. It is indeed full of sharp, biting sentences against the women, of which he was fond. The following may serve as a specimen. Truewit says, "Did I not tell thee, Dauphine? Why, all their actions are governed by crude opinion, without reason or cause; they know not why they do anything; but, as they are informed, believe, judge, praise, condemn, love, hate, and in emulation one of another, do all these things alike. Only they have a natural inclination sways 'em generally to the worst, when they are left to themselves." This is a cynical sentence; and we may say of the rest of his opinions, that "even though we should hold them to be true, yet it is slander to have them so set down." The women in this play indeed justify the author's severity; they are altogether abominable. They have an utter want of principle and decency, and are equally without a sense of pleasure, taste, or elegance. Madame Haughty, Madame Centaur, and Madame Mavis, form the College, as it is here pedantically called. They are a sort of candidates for being upon the town, but cannot find seducers, and a sort of blue-stockings, before the invention of letters. Mistress Epicene, the silent gentlewoman, turns out not to be a woman at all; which is not a very pleasant *denouement* of the plot, and is itself an incident apparently taken from the blundering blind-man's buff conclusion of the 'Merry Wives of Windsor.' What Shakspeare might introduce by an accident, and as a mere passing jest, Ben Jonson would set about building a whole play upon. The directions for making love given by Truewit, the author's favourite, discover great knowledge and shrewdness of observation, mixed with the acuteness of malice, and approach to the best style of comic dialogue. But I must refer to the play itself for them.

'Volpone, or the Fox,' is his best play. It is prolix and improbable, but intense and powerful. It is written *con amore*. It is made up of cheats and dupes, and the author is at home among them. He shows his hatred of the one and contempt for the other, and makes them set one another off to great advantage. There are several striking dramatic contrasts in this play, where the Fox lies *perdu* to watch his prey, where Mosca is the dextrous go-between, outwitting his gulls, his employer, and him-

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self, and where each of the gaping legacy-hunters, the lawyer, the merchant, and the miser, eagerly occupied with the ridiculousness of the other's pretensions, is blind only to the absurdity of his own: but the whole is worked up too mechanically, and our credulity overstretched at last revolts into scepticism, and our attention overtasked flags into drowsiness. This play seems formed on the model of Plautus, in unity of plot and interest; and old Ben, in emulating his classic model, appears to have done his best. There is the same caustic, unsparing severity in it as in his other works. His patience is tried to the utmost. His words drop gall.

> "Hood an ass with reverend purple,
> So you can hide his too ambitious ears,
> And he shall pass for a cathedral doctor."

The scene between Volpone, Mosca, Voltore, Corvino, and Corbaccio, at the outset, will show the dramatic power in the conduct of this play, and will be my justification in what I have said of the literal tenaciousness (to a degree that is repulsive) of the author's imaginary descriptions.

'Every Man in his Humour,' is a play well known to the public. This play acts better than it reads. The pathos in the principal character, Kitely, is "as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage." There is, however, a certain good sense and discrimination, or logic of passion in the part, which affords excellent hints for an able actor, and which, if properly pointed, gives it considerable force on the stage. Bobadil is the only actually striking character in the play, or which tells equally in the closet and the theatre; he is the real hero of the piece. His well-known proposal for the pacification of Europe by killing some twenty of them, each his man a day, is as good as any other that has been suggested up to the present moment. His extravagant affectation, his blustering and cowardice, are an entertaining medley; and his final defeat and exposure, though exceedingly humourous, are the most affecting part of the story. Brainworm is a particularly dry and abstruse character. We neither know his business nor his motives: his plots are as intricate as they are useless, and as the ignorance of those he im-

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poses upon is wonderful. This is the impression in reading it. Yet from the bustle and activity of this character on the stage, the changes of dress, the variety of affected tones and gipsy jargon, and the limping affected gestures, it is a very amusing theatrical exhibition. The rest, Master Matthew, Master Stephen, Cob, and Cob's wife, were living in the sixteenth century. That is all we all know of them. But from the very oddity of their appearance and behaviour, they have a very droll and even picturesque effect when acted. It seems a revival of the dead. We believe in their existence when we see them. As an example of the power of the stage in giving reality and interest to what otherwise would be without it, I might mention the scene in which Brainworm praises Master Stephen's leg. The folly here is insipid from its being seemingly carried to an excess, till we see it; and then we laugh the more at it, the more incredible we thought it before.

'Bartholomew Fair' is chiefly remarkable for the exhibition of odd humours and tumbler's tricks, and is on that account amusing to read once. 'The Alchymist' is the most famous of this author's comedies, though I think it does not deserve its reputation. It contains all that is quaint, dreary, obsolete, and hopeless in this once famed art, but not the golden dreams and splendid disappointments. We have the mere circumstantials of the sublime science, pots and kettles, aprons and bellows, crucibles and diagrams, all the refuse and rubbish, not the essence, the true *elixir vitæ*. There is, however, one glorious scene between Surly and Sir Epicure Mammon, which is the finest example I know of dramatic sophistry, or of an attempt to prove the existence of a thing by an imposing description of its effects; but compared with this, the rest of the play is a *caput mortuum*. The scene I allude to is the following:—

> "*Mammon.* Come on, Sir. Now, you set your foot on shore
> In *Novo Orbe*; here's the rich Peru;
> And there, within, Sir, are the golden mines,
> Great Solomon's Ophir! He was sailing to 't
> Three years, but we have reached it in ten months.
> This is the day wherein, to all my friends,
> I will pronounce the happy word, BE RICH:

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This day you shall be Spectatissimi.
You shall no more deal with the hollow dye,
Or the frail card. * * * * *
You shall start up young viceroys,
And have you your punks and punketees, my Surly;
And unto thee, I speak it first, BE RICH.
Where is my Subtle, there? Within, oh!
Face. [*within*] Sir, he'll come to you by and by.
Mam. That is his Firedrake,
His Lungs, his Zephyrus, he that puffs his coals,
Till he firk nature up in her own centre.
You are not faithful, Sir. This night I'll change
All that is metal in my house to gold;
And early in the morning will I send
To all the plumbers and the pewterers,
And buy their tin and lead up; and to Lothbury,
For all the copper.
Surly. What, and turn that too?
Mam. Yes, and I'll purchase Devonshire and Cornwall,
And make them perfect Indies! You admire now?
Surly. No, faith.
Mam. But when you see th' effects of the great medicine,
Of which one part projected on a hundred
Of Mercury, or Venus, or the Moon,
Shall turn it to as many of the Sun;
Nay, to a thousand, so *ad infinitum*;
You will believe me.
Surly. Yes, when I see't, I will.—
Mam. Ha! why?
Do you think I fable with you? I assure you,
He that has once the flower of the Sun,
The perfect ruby, which we call Elixir,
Not only can do that, but, by its virtue,
Can confer honour, love, respect, long life;
Give safety, valour, yea, and victory,
To whom he will. In eight and twenty days
I'll make an old man of fourscore a child.
Surly No doubt; he's that already.
Mam. Nay, I mean,
Restore his years, renew him, like an eagle,
To the fifth age; make him get sons and daughters,
Young giants: as our philosophers have done,
The ancient patriarchs, afore the flood,
But taking, once a week, on a knife's point,
The quantity of a grain of mustard of it;

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Become stout Marses, and beget young Cupids.
* * * * * * * *
You are incredulous.
Surly. Faith, I have a humour.
I would not willingly be gulled. Your stone
Cannot transmute me.
Mam. Pertinax, my Surly,
Will you believe antiquity? records?
I'll show you a book where Moses and his sister,
And Solomon, have written of the art;
Ay, and a treatise penn'd by Adam—
Surly. How!
Mam. Of the philosophers' stone, and in High Dutch.
Surly. Did Adam write, Sir, in High Dutch?
Mam. He did;
Which proves it was the primitive tongue.
* * * * *
[*Enter Face, as a servant.*
How now!
Do we succeed? Is our day come, and holds it?
Face. The evening will set red upon you, Sir;
You have colour for it, crimson; the red ferment
Has done his office: three hours hence prepare you
To see projection.
Mam. Pertinax, my Surly,
Again I say to thee aloud, Be rich.
This day thou shalt have ingots, and to-morrow
Give lords the affront. * * * Where's thy master?
Face. At his prayers, Sir, he;
Good man, he's doing his devotions
For the success.
Mam. Lungs, I will set a period
To all thy labours; thou shalt be the master
Of my seraglio . . . .
For I do mean
To have a list of wives and concubines
Equal with Solomon: * * * *
I will have all my beds blown up, not stuft:
Down is too hard; and then, mine oval room
Fill'd with such pictures as Tiberius took
From Elephantis, and dull Aretine
But coldly imitated. Then my glasses
Cut in more subtle angles, to disperse
And multiply the figures as I walk * * * My mists
I'll have of perfumes, vapoured about the room

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To lose ourselves in; and my baths like pits
To fall into; from whence we will come forth
And roll us dry in gossamer and roses.
Is it arriv'd at ruby? Where I spy
A wealthy citizen, or a rich lawyer,
Have a sublimed pure wife, unto that fellow
I'll send a thousand pound to be my cuckold.
Face. And I shall carry it?
Mam. No. I'll have no bawds.
But fathers and mothers. They will do it best,
Best of all others. And my flatterers
Shall be the pure and gravest of divines
That I can get for money.
We will be brave, Puffe, now we have the medicine.
My meat shall all come in, in Indian shells,
Dishes of agate set in gold, and studded
With emeralds, sapphire, hyacinths, and rubies.
The tongues of carps, dormice, and camel's heels
Boil'd in the spirit of Sol, and dissolv'd pearl,
Apicius' diet, 'gainst the epilepsy;
And I will eat these broths with spoons of amber,
Headed with diamond and carbuncle.
My footboys shall eat pheasants, calver'd salmons,
Knots, godwits, lampreys; I myself will have
The beards of barbels serv'd instead of salads;
Oil'd mushrooms; and the swelling unctuous paps
Of a fat pregnant sow, newly cut off,
Dressed with an exquisite and poignant sauce;
For which I'll say unto my cook, *There's gold,*
Go forth and be a knight.
Face. Sir, I'll go look
A little how it heightens.
Mam. Do. My shirts
I'll have of taffeta-sarsnet, soft and light
As cobwebs; and for all my other raiment,
It shall be such as might provoke the Persian,
Were he to teach the world riot anew.
My gloves of fishes and birds' skins, perfum'd
With gums of Paradise and eastern air.
Surly. And do you think to have the stone with this?
Mam. No, I do think t' have all this with the stone.
Surly. Why, I have heard he must be *homo frugi,*
A pious, holy, and religious man,
One free from mortal sin, a very virgin,—
Mam. That makes it, Sir, he is so;—but I buy it.

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My venture brings it me. He, honest wretch,
A notable, superstitious, good soul,
Has worn his knees bare, and his slippers bald,
With prayer and fasting for it, and, Sir, let him
Do it alone, for me, still; here he comes;
Not a profane word afore him: 'tis poison."

Act ii, *scene* i.

I have only to add a few words on Beaumont and Fletcher. 'Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,' 'The Chances,' and 'The Wild Goose Chase,' the original of the 'Inconstant,' are superior in style and execution to anything of Ben Jonson's. They are, indeed, some of the best comedies on the stage; and one proof that they are so is, that they still hold possession of it. They show the utmost alacrity of invention in contriving ludicrous distresses, and the utmost spirit in bearing up against, or impatience and irritation under them. Don John, in 'The Chances,' is the heroic in comedy. Leon, in 'Rule a Wife and Have a Wife,' is a fine exhibition of the born gentleman and natural fool: the Copper Captain is sterling to this hour: his mistress, Estifania, only died the other day with Mrs. Jordan: and the two grotesque females in the same play, act better than the Witches in 'Macbeth.'

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LECTURE III.

On Cowley, Butler, Suckling, Etherege, &c.

The metaphysical poets or wits of the age of James and Charles I., whose style was adopted and carried to a more dazzling and fantastic excess by Cowley in the following reign, after which it declined, and gave place almost entirely to the poetry of observation and reasoning, are thus happily characterised by Dr. Johnson.

"The metaphysical poets were men of learning, and to show their learning was their whole endeavour: but unluckily resolving to show it in rhyme, instead of writing poetry, they only wrote verses, and very often such verses as stood the trial of the finger better than of the ear; for the modulation was so imperfect, that they were only found to be verses by counting the syllables.

"If the father of criticism has rightly denominated poetry τεχνη μιμητικη, *an imitative art*, these writers will, without great wrong, lose their right to the name of poets, for they cannot be said to have imitated anything; they neither copied nature nor life; neither painted the forms of matter, nor represented the operations of intellect."

The whole of the account is well worth reading; it was a subject for which Dr. Johnson's powers both of thought and expression were better fitted than any other man's. If he had had the same capacity for following the flights of a truly poetic imagination, or for feeling the finer touches of nature, that he had felicity and force in detecting and exposing the aberrations from the broad and beaten path of propriety and common sense, he would have amply deserved the reputation he has acquired as a philosophical critic.

The writers here referred to (such as Donne, Davies, Cra-

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shaw, and others) not merely mistook learning for poetry—they thought anything was poetry that differed from ordinary prose and the natural impression of things, by being intricate, far-fetched, and improbable. Their style was not so properly learned as metaphysical; that is to say, whenever, by any violence done to their ideas, they could make out an abstract likeness or possible ground of comparison, they forced the image, whether learned or vulgar, into the service of the Muses. Anything would do to "hitch into a rhyme," no matter whether striking or agreeable, or not, so that it would puzzle the reader to discover the meaning, and if there was the most remote circumstance, however trifling or vague, for the pretended comparison to hinge upon. They brought ideas together not the most, but the least like; and of which the collision produced not light, but obscurity—served not to strengthen, but to confound. Their mystical verses read like riddles or an allegory. They neither belong to the class of lively or severe poetry. They have not the force of the one, nor the gaiety of the other; but are an ill-assorted, unprofitable union of the two together, applying to serious subjects that quaint and partial style of allusion which fits only what is light and ludicrous, and building the most laboured conclusions on the most fantastical and slender premises. The object of the poetry of imagination is to raise or adorn one idea by another more striking or more beautiful: the object of these writers was to match any one idea with any other idea, *for better for worse*, as we say, and whether anything was gained by the change of condition or not. The object of the poetry of the passions, again, is to illustrate any strong feeling, by showing the same feeling as connected with objects or circumstances more palpable and touching; but here the object was to strain and distort the immediate feeling into some barely possible consequence or recondite analogy, in which it required the utmost stretch of misapplied ingenuity to trace the smallest connection with the original impression. In short, the poetry of this period was strictly the poetry not of ideas, but of *definitions*: it proceeded in mode and figure, by *genus* and specific difference; and was the logic of the schools, or an oblique and forced construction of dry, literal matter-of-fact, decked ou

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in a robe of glittering conceits, and clogged with the halting shackles of verse. The imagination of the writers, instead of being conversant with the face of nature, or the secrets of the heart, was lost in the labyrinths of intellectual abstraction, or entangled in the technical quibbles and impertinent intricacies of language. The complaint so often made, and here repeated, is not of the want of power in these men, but of the waste of it; not of the absence of genius, but the abuse of it. They had (many of them) great talents committed to their trust, richness of thought, and depth of feeling; but they chose to hide them (as much as they possibly could) under a false show of learning and unmeaning subtlety. From the style which they had systematically adopted, they thought nothing done till they had perverted simplicity into affectation, and spoiled nature by art. They seemed to think there was an irreconcileable opposition between genius, as well as grace and nature; tried to do without, or else constantly to thwart her; left nothing to her outward "impress," or spontaneous impulses, but made a point of twisting and torturing almost every subject they took in hand, till they had fitted it to the mould of their self-opinion and the previous fabrications of their own fancy, like those who pen acrostics in the shape of pyramids, and cut out trees into the form of peacocks. Their chief aim is to make you wonder at the writer, not to interest you in the subject; and by an incessant craving after admiration, they have lost what they might have gained with less extravagance and affectation. So Cowper, who was of a quite opposite school, speaks feelingly of the misapplication of Cowley's poetical genius.

> "And though reclaim'd by modern lights
> From an erroneous taste,
> I cannot but lament thy splendid wit
> Entangled in the cobwebs of the schools."

Donne, who was considerably before Cowley, is without his fancy, but was more recondite in his logic, and rigid in his descriptions. He is hence led, particularly in his satires, to tell disagreeable truths in as disagreeable a way as possible, or to convey a pleasing and affecting thought (of which there are

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many to be found in his other writings) by the harshest means, and with the most painful effort. His Muse suffers continual pangs and throes. His thoughts are delivered by the Cæsarean operation. The sentiments, profound and tender as they often are, are stifled in the expression; and "heaved pantingly forth," are "buried quick again" under the ruins and rubbish of analytical distinctions. It is like Poetry waking from a trance: with an eye bent idly on the outward world, and half-forgotten feelings crowding about the heart; with vivid impressions, dim notions, and disjointed words. The following may serve as instances of beautiful or impassioned reflections losing themselves in obscure and difficult applications. He has some lines to a Blossom, which begin thus:

"Little think'st thou, poor flow'r,
Whom I have watched six or seven days,
And seen thy birth, and seen what every hour
Gave to thy growth, thee to this height to raise,
And now dost laugh and triumph on this bough,
Little think'st thou
That it will freeze anon, and that I shall
To-morrow find thee fall'n, or not at all."

This simple and delicate description is only introduced as a foundation for an elaborate metaphysical conceit as a parallel to it, in the next stanza.

"Little think'st thou (poor heart
That labour'st yet to nestle thee,
And think'st by hovering here to get a part
In a forbidden or forbidding tree,
And hop'st her stiffness by long siege to bow:)
Little think'st thou,
That thou to-morrow, ere the sun doth wake,
Must with this sun and me a journey take."

This is but a lame and impotent conclusion from so delightful a beginning. He thus notices the circumstance of his wearing his late wife's hair about his arm, in a little poem which is called the Funeral:

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"Whoever comes to shroud me, do not harm
Nor question much
That subtle wreath of hair, about mine arm;
The mystery, the sign you must not touch."

The scholastic reason he gives quite dissolves the charm of tender and touching grace in the sentiment itself—

"For 'tis my outward soul,
Viceroy to that, which unto heaven being gone,
Will leave this to control,
And keep these limbs, her provinces, from dissolution."

Again, the following lines, the title of which is 'Love's Deity,' are highly characteristic of this author's manner, in which the thoughts are inlaid in a costly but imperfect mosaic-work.

"I long to talk with some old lover's ghost,
Who died before the God of Love was born;
I cannot think that he, who then loved most,
Sunk so low, as to love one which did scorn.
But since this God produc'd a destiny,
And that vice-nature, custom, lets it be;
I must love her that loves not me."

The stanza in the 'Epithalamion on a Count Palatine of the Rhine,' has been often quoted against him, and is an almost irresistible illustration of the extravagances to which this kind of writing, which turns upon a pivot of words and possible allusions, is liable. Speaking of the bride and bridegroom he says by way of serious compliment—

"Here lies a she-Sun, and a he-Moon there,
She gives the best light to his sphere;
Or each is both and all, and so
They unto one another nothing owe."

His love-verses and epistles to his friends give the most favourable idea of Donne. His satires are too clerical. He shows, if I may so speak, too much disgust, and, at the same time, too much contempt for vice. His dogmatical invectives hardly redeem the nauseousness of his descriptions, and compromise the imagination of his readers more than they assist their reason.

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The satirist does not write with the same authority as the divine, and should use his poetical privileges more sparingly. "To the pure all things are pure," is a maxim which a man like Dr. Donne may be justified in applying to himself; but he might have recollected that it could not be construed to extend to the generality of his readers, *without benefit of clergy.*

Bishop Hall's Satires are coarse railing in verse, and hardly that. Pope has, however, contrived to avail himself of them in some of his imitations.

Sir John Davies is the author of a poem on the Soul, and of one on Dancing. In both he shows great ingenuity, and sometimes terseness and vigour. In the last of these two poems his fancy *pirouettes* in a very lively and agreeable manner, but something too much in the style of a French opera-dancer, with sharp angular turns, and repeated deviations from the faultless line of simplicity and nature.

Crashaw was a writer of the same ambitious stamp, whose imagination was rendered still more inflammable by the fervours of fanaticism, and who having been converted from Protestantism to Popery (a weakness to which the "seething brains" of the poets of this period were prone) by some visionary appearance of the Virgin Mary, poured out his devout raptures and zealous enthusiasm in a torrent of poetical hyperboles. The celebrated Latin epigram on the miracle of our Saviour, "The water blushed into wine," is in his usual *hectic* manner. His translation of the contest between the Musician and the Nightingale is the best specimen of his powers.

Davenant's 'Gondibert' is a tissue of stanzas, all aiming to be wise and witty, each containing something in itself, and the whole together amounting to nothing. The thoughts separately require so much attention to understand them, and arise so little out of the narrative, that they with difficulty sink into the mind, and have no common feeling of interest to recall or link them together afterwards. The general style may be judged of by these two memorable lines in the description of the skeleton-chamber.

> "Yet on that wall hangs he too, who so thought,
> And she dried by him whom that he obeyed."

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Mr. Hobbes, in a prefatory discourse, has thrown away a good deal of powerful logic and criticism in the recommendation of the plan of his friend's poem. Davenant, who was poet-laureate to Charles II., wrote several masques and plays which were well received in his time, but have not come down with equal applause to us.

Marvel (on whom I have already bestowed such praise as I could, for elegance and tenderness in his descriptive poems) in his satires and witty pieces was addicted to the affected and involved style here reprobated, as in his 'Flecknoe' (the origin of Dryden's 'Macflecknoe') and in his satire on the Dutch. As an instance of this forced, far-fetched method of treating his subject, he says, in ridicule of the Hollanders, that when their dykes overflowed, the fish used to come to table with them,

"And sat not as a meat, but as a guest."

There is a poem of Marvel's on the death of King Charles I., which I have not seen, but which I have heard praised by one whose praise is never high but of the highest things, for the beauty and pathos, as well as the generous frankness of the sentiments, coming, as they did, from a determined and incorruptible political foe.

Shadwell was a successful and voluminous dramatic writer of much the same period. His 'Libertine' (taken from the celebrated Spanish story) is full of spirit; but it is the spirit of licentiousness and impiety. At no time do there appear to have been such extreme speculations afloat on the subject of religion and morality, as there were shortly after the Reformation, and afterwards under the Stuarts, the differences being widened by political irritation; and the Puritans often over-acting one extreme out of grimace and hypocrisy, as the king's party did the other out of *bravado*.

Carew is excluded from his pretensions to the laureateship in Suckling's 'Sessions of the Poets,' on account of his slowness. His verses are delicate and pleasing, with a certain feebleness, but with very little tincture of the affectation of this period. His masque (called '*Cœlum Britannicum*') in celebration of a marriage at court, has not much wit or fancy, but the accompanying

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prose directions and commentary on the mythological story, are written with wonderful facility and elegance, in a style of familiar dramatic dialogue approaching nearer the writers of Queen Anne's reign than those of Queen Elisabeth's.

Milton's name is included by Dr. Johnson in the list of metaphysical poets on no better authority than his lines on Hobson the Cambridge Carrier, which he acknowledges were the only ones Milton wrote on this model. Indeed, he is the great contrast to that style of poetry, being remarkable for breadth and massiness, or what Dr. Johnson calls "aggregation of ideas," beyond almost any other poet. He has in this respect been compared to Michael Angelo, but not with much reason: his verses are

> ——— "inimitable on earth
> By model, or by shading pencil drawn."

Suckling is also ranked, without sufficient warrant, among the metaphysical poets. Sir John was "of the court, courtly;" and his style almost entirely free from the charge of pedantry and affectation. There are a few blemishes of this kind in his works, but they are but few. His compositions are almost all of them short and lively effusions of wit and gallantry, written in a familiar but spirited style, without much design or effort. His shrewd and taunting address to a desponding lover will sufficiently vouch for the truth of this account of the general cast of his best pieces.

> "Why so pale and wan, fond lover?
> Pr'ythee why so pale?
> Will, when looking well can't move her,
> Looking ill prevail?
> Pr'ythee why so pale?
>
> Why so dull and mute, young sinner?
> Pr'ythee why so mute?
> Will, when speaking well, can't win her,
> Saying nothing do't?
> Pr'ythee why so mute?
>
> Quit, quit for shame, this will not move,
> This cannot take her;

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If of herself she will not love,
Nothing can make her;
The Devil take her."

The two short poems against Fruition, that beginning, "There never yet was woman made, nor shall, but to be cursed,"—the song, "I pr'ythee, spare me gentle boy, Press me no more for that slight toy, That foolish trifle of a heart,"—another, "'Tis now, since I sat down before That foolish fort, a heart,"—*Lutea Alanson*—the set of similes, "Hast thou seen the down in the air, When wanton winds have tost it,"—and his "Dream," which is of a more tender and romantic cast, are all exquisite in their way. They are the origin of the style of Prior and Gay in their short fugitive verses, and of the songs in the 'Beggar's Opera.' His 'Ballad on a Wedding' is his masterpiece, and is indeed unrivalled in that class of composition, for the voluptuous delicacy of the sentiments, and the luxuriant richness of the images. I wish I could repeat the whole, but that, from the change of manners, is impossible. The description of the bride is (half of it) as follows: the story is supposed to be told by one countryman to another:—

"Her finger was so small, the ring
Would not stay on, which they did bring;
It was too wide a peck:
And to say truth (for out it must)
It look'd like the great collar (just)
About our young colt's neck.

Her feet beneath her petticoat,
Like little mice, stole in and out,
As if they feared the light:
But oh! she dances such a way!
No sun upon an Easter-day
Is half so fine a sight.

* * * * *

Her cheeks so rare a white was on
No daisy makes comparison
(Who sees them is undone,)
For streaks of red were mingled there,
Such as are on a Cath'rine pear,
(The side that's next the sun.)

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Her lips were red; and one was thin,
Compar'd to that was next her chin;
(Some bee had stung it newly)
But (Dick) her eyes so guard her face,
I durst no more upon them gaze,
Than on the sun in July.

Her mouth so small, when she does speak,
Thoud'st swear her teeth her words did break,
That they might passage get;
But she so handled still the matter,
They came as good as ours, or better,
And are not spent a whit."

There is to me in the whole of this delightful performance a freshness and purity like the first breath of morning. Its sportive irony never trespasses on modesty, though it sometimes (laughing) threatens to do so! Suckling's Letters are full of habitual gaiety and good sense. His 'Discourse on Reason in Religion' is well enough meant. Though he excelled in the conversational style of poetry, writing verse with the freedom and readiness, vivacity and unconcern, with which he would have talked on the most familiar and sprightly topics, his peculiar powers deserted him in attempting dramatic dialogue. His comedy of the 'Goblins' is equally defective in plot, wit, and nature; it is a wretched list of *exits* and *entrances*, and the whole business of the scene is taken up in the unaccountable seizure, and equally unaccountable escapes, of a number of persons from a band of robbers in the shape of Goblins, who turn out to be noblemen and gentlemen in disguise. Suckling was not a Grub street author; or it might be said, that this play is like what he might have written after dreaming all night of duns and a sponging house. His tragedies are no better: their titles are the most interesting part of them, 'Aglaura,' 'Brennoralt,' and 'The Sad One.'

Cowley had more brilliancy of fancy and ingenuity of thought than Donne, with less pathos and sentiment. His mode of illustrating his ideas differs also from Donne's in this—that whereas Donne is contented to analyse an image into its component elements, and resolve it into its most abstracted species, Cowley

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first does this, indeed, but does not stop till he has fixed upon some other prominent example of the same general class of ideas, and forced them into a metaphorical union, by the medium of the generic definition. Thus he says—

"The Phœnix Pindar is a vast species alone."

He means to say that he stands by himself; he is then "a vast species alone:" then by applying to this generality the *principium individuationis*, he becomes a Phœnix, because the Phœnix is the only example of a species contained in an individual. Yet this is only a literal or metaphysical coincidence; and literally and metaphysically speaking, Pindar was not a species by himself, but only seemed so by pre-eminence or excellence; that is, from qualities of mind appealing to and absorbing the imagination, and which, therefore, ought to be represented in poetical language by some other obvious and palpable image, exhibiting the same kind or degree of excellence in other things, as when Gray compares him to the Theban eagle,

"Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air."

Again, he talks in the Motto, or invocation to his Muse, of "marching the Muse's Hannibal" into undiscovered regions. That is, he thinks first of being a leader in poetry, and then he immediately, by virtue of this abstraction, becomes a Hannibal; though no two things can really be more unlike, in all the associations belonging to them, than a leader of armies and a leader of the tuneful nine. In like manner, he compares Bacon to Moses; for in *his* verses extremes are sure to meet. The 'Hymn to Light,' which forms a perfect contrast to Milton's 'Invocation to Light,' in the commencement of the third book of 'Paradise Lost,' begins in the following manner:—

"First-born of Chaos, who so fair didst come
From the old negro's darksome womb!
Which, when it saw the lovely child,
The melancholy mass put on kind looks, and smil'd."

* * * * *

And soon after—

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"'Tis, I believe, this archery to show
That so much cost in colours thou,
And skill in painting, dost bestow,
Upon thy ancient arms, the gaudy heav'nly bow.

Swift as light thoughts their empty career run,
Thy race is finished when begun;
Let a post-angel start with thee,
And thou the goal of earth shalt reach as soon as he."

The conceits here are neither wit nor poetry; but a burlesque upon both, made up of a singular metaphorical jargon, verbal generalities, and physical analogies. Thus his calling Chaos, or Darkness, "the old negro," would do for abuse or jest, but is too remote and degrading for serious poetry, and yet it is meant for such. The "old negro" is at best a nickname, and the smile on its face loses its beauty in such company. The making out the rainbow to be a species of heraldic painting, and converting an angel into a post-boy, show the same rage for comparison; but such comparisons are as odious as they are unjust. Dr. Johnson has multiplied instances of the same false style in its various divisions and subdivisions.* Of Cowley's serious poems, the 'Complaint' is the one I like the best; and some of his translations in the Essays, as those on 'Liberty' and 'Retirement,' are exceedingly good. The Odes to Vandyke, to the Royal Society, to Hobbes, and to the latter Brutus, beginning "Excellent Brutus," are all full of ingenious and high thoughts, impaired by a load of ornament and quaint disguises. The 'Chronicle, or List of his Mistresses,' is the best of his original lighter pieces; but the best of his poems are the translations from Anacreon, which remain, and are likely to remain, unrivalled. The spirit of wine and joy circulates in them; and though they are lengthened out beyond the originals, it is by fresh impulses of an eager and inexhaustible feeling of delight. Here are some of them:—

* See his Lives of the British Poets, Vol. I.

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DRINKING.

"The thirsty earth soaks up the rain,
And drinks, and gapes for drink again.
The plants suck in the earth, and are
With constant drinking fresh and fair.
The sea itself, which one would think
Should have but little need of drink,
Drinks twice ten thousand rivers up,
So fill'd that they o'erflow the cup.
The busy sun (and one would guess
By 's drunken fiery face no less)
Drinks up the sea, and, when he 's done,
The moon and stars drink up the sun.
They drink and dance by their own light,
They drink and revel all the night.
Nothing in nature's sober found,
But an eternal health goes round.
Fill up the bowl then, fill it high,
Fill all the glasses there; for why
Should every creature drink but I;
Why, man of morals, tell me why?"

This is a classical intoxication; and the poet's imagination, giddy with fancied joys, communicates its spirit and its motion to inanimate things, and makes all nature reel round with it. It is not easy to decide between these choice pieces, which may be reckoned among the *delights of human kind;* but that to the Grasshopper is one of the happiest as well as most serious:—

"Happy insect, what can be
In happiness compar'd to thee?
Fed with nourishment divine,
The dewy morning's gentle wine!
Nature waits upon thee still,
And thy verdant cup does fill;
'Tis filled wherever thou dost tread,
Nature's self thy Ganymede.

Thou dost drink, and dance, and sing;
Happier than the happiest king!
All the fields which thou dost see,
All the plants, belong to thee;
All that summer-hours produce,
Fertile made with early juice.

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Man for thee does sow and plough,
Farmer he, and landlord thou!
Thou dost innocently joy;
Nor does thy luxury destroy;
The shepherd gladly heareth thee,
More harmonious than he.
Thee country hinds with gladness hear,
Prophet of the ripen'd year!
Thee Phœbus loves, and does inspire;
Phœbus is himself thy sire.

To thee, of all things upon earth,
Life is no longer than thy mirth.
Happy insect, happy thou!
Dost neither age nor winter know;
But, when thou'st drunk, and danc'd, and sung
Thy fill the flowery leaves among,
(Voluptuous and wise withal,
Epicurean animal!)
Sated with thy summer feast,
Thou retir'st to endless rest."

Cowley's Essays are among the most agreeable prose compositions in our language, being equally recommended by sense, wit, learning, and interesting personal history, and written in a style quite free from the faults of his poetry. It is a pity that he did not cultivate his talent for prose more, and write less in verse, for he was clearly a man of more reflection than imagination. The Essays on Agriculture, on Liberty, on Solitude, and on Greatness, are all of them delightful. From the last I may give his account of Senecio as an addition to the instances of the ludicrous, which I have attempted to enumerate in the introductory Lecture; whose ridiculous affectation of grandeur Seneca the elder (he tells us) describes to this effect: "Senecio was a man of a turbid and confused wit, who could not endure to speak any but mighty words and sentences, till this humour grew at last into so notorious a habit, or rather disease, as became the sport of the whole town: he would have no servants, but huge, massy fellows; no plate or household stuff, but thrice as big as the fashion: you may believe me, for I speak it without raillery, his extravagancy came at last into such a madness, that he would not put on a pair of shoes, each of which was not big enough

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for both his feet; he would eat nothing but what was great, nor touch any fruit but horse-plums and pound-pears; he kept a mistress that was a very giantess, and made her walk too always in chiopins, till at last he got the surname of Senecio Grandio." This was certainly the most absurd person we read of in antiquity. Cowley's character of Oliver Cromwell, which is intended as a satire (though it certainly produces a very different impression on the mind,) may vie for truth of outline and force of colouring with the masterpieces of the Greek and Latin historians. It may serve as a contrast to the last extract. "What can be more extraordinary than that a person of mean birth, no fortune, no eminent qualities of body, which have sometimes, or of mind, which have often, raised men to the highest dignities, should have the courage to attempt, and the happiness to succeed in, so improbable a design as the destruction of one of the most ancient and most solidly-founded monarchies upon the earth? That he should have the power or boldness to put his prince and master to an open and infamous death; to banish that numerous and strongly-allied family; to do all this under the name and wages of a parliament; to trample upon them too as he pleased, and spurn them out of doors when he grew weary of them; to raise up a new and unheard-of-monster out of their ashes; to stifle that in the very infancy, and set up himself above all things that ever were called sovereign in England; to oppress all his enemies by arms, and all his friends afterwards by artifice; to serve all parties patiently for a while, and to command them victoriously at last; to over-run each corner of the three nations, and overcome with equal facility both the riches of the south and the poverty of the north; to be feared and courted by all foreign princes, and adopted a brother to the gods of the earth; to call together Parliaments with a word of his pen, and scatter them again with the breath of his mouth; to be humbly and daily petitioned that he would please to be hired, at the rate of two millions a year, to be the master of those who had hired him before to be their servant; to have the estates and lives of three kingdoms as much at his disposal as was the little inheritance of his father, and to be as noble and liberal in the spending of them; and lastly (for there is no end of all the

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particulars of his glory,) to bequeath all this with one word to his posterity; to die with peace at home, and triumph abroad; to be buried among kings, and with more than regal solemnity; and to leave a name behind him, not to be extinguished, but with the whole world; which, as it is now too little for his praises, so might have been too for his conquests, if the short line of his human life could have been stretched out to the extent of his immortal designs?"

Cowley has left one comedy, called 'Cutter of Coleman Street,' which met with an unfavourable reception at the time, and is now (not undeservedly) forgotten. It contains, however, one good scene, which is rich both in fancy and humour, that between the puritanical bride, Tabitha, and her ranting royalist husband. It is said that this play was originally composed, and afterwards revived, as a satire upon the Presbyterian party; yet it was resented by the court party as a satire upon itself. A man must, indeed, be sufficiently blind with party-prejudice, to have considered this as a compliment to his own side of the question. "Call you this backing of your friends?" The cavaliers are in this piece represented as reduced to the lowest shifts in point of fortune, and sunk still lower in point of principle.

The greatest single production of wit of this period, I might say of this country, is Butler's 'Hudibras.' It contains specimens of every variety of drollery and satire, and those specimens crowded together into almost every page. The proof of this is, that nearly one half of his lines are got by heart, and quoted for mottos. In giving instances of different sorts of wit, or trying to recollect good things of this kind, they are the first which stand ready in the memory; and they are those which furnish the best tests and most striking illustrations of what we want. Dr. Campbell, in his 'Philosophy of Rhetoric,' when treating of the subject of wit, which he has done very neatly and sensibly, has constant recourse to two authors, Pope and Butler, the one for ornament, the other more for use. Butler is equally in the hands of the learned and the vulgar, for the sense is generally as solid as the images are amusing and grotesque. Whigs and Tories join in his praise. He could not, in spite of himself,

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"narrow his mind,
And to party give up what was meant for mankind."

Though his subject was local and temporary, his fame was not circumscribed within his own age. He was admired by Charles II. and has been rewarded by posterity. It is the poet's fate! It is not, perhaps, to be wondered at, that arbitrary and worthless monarchs like Charles II. should neglect those who pay court to them. The idol (if it had sense) would despise its worshippers. Indeed, Butler hardly merited anything on the score of loyalty to the house of Stuart. True wit is not a parasite plant. The strokes which it aims at folly and knavery on one side of a question, tell equally home on the other. Dr. Zachary Grey, who added notes to the poem, and abused the leaders of Cromwell's party by name, would be more likely to have gained a pension for his services than Butler, who was above such petty work. A poem like 'Hudibras' could not be *made to order of a court.* Charles might very well have reproached the author with wanting to show his own wit and sense rather than to favour a tottering cause; and he has even been suspected, in parts of his poem, of glancing at majesty itself. He in general ridicules not persons, but things, not a party, but their principles, which may belong, as time and occasion serve, to one set of solemn pretenders or another. This he has done most effectually, in every possible way, and from every possible source, learned or unlearned. He has exhausted the moods and figures of satire and sophistry.* It would be possible to deduce the different forms of syllogism in Aristotle, from the different violations or mock-imitations of them in Butler. He fulfils every one of Barrow's conditions of wit, which I have enumerated in the first Lecture. He makes you laugh or smile by comparing the

* "And have not two saints power to use
A greater privilege than three Jews?
* * * *
Her voice the music of the spheres,
So loud it deafens mortals' ears.
As wise philosophers have thought
And that's the cause we hear it not."

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high to the low,* or by pretending to raise the low to the lofty;† he succeeds equally in the familiarity of his illustrations,‡ or their incredible extravagance,§ by comparing things that are alike or not alike He surprises equally by his coincidences or contradictions, by spinning out a long-winded flimsy excuse, or by turning short upon you with the point-blank truth. His rhymes are as witty as his reasons, equally remote from what common custom would suggest;‖ and he startles you sometimes

* "No Indian prince has to his palace
More followers than a thief to the gallows."

† "And in his nose, like Indian king,
He (Bruin) wore for ornament a ring."

‡ "Whose noise whets valour sharp, like beer
By thunder turned to vinegar."

§ "Replete with strange hermetic powder,
That wounds nine miles point-blank would solder."
* * * *
His tawny beard was th' equal grace
Both of his wisdom and his face;
In cut and die so like a tile,
A sudden view it would beguile:
The upper part thereof was whey,
The nether orange mixed with gray.
This hairy meteor did denounce
The fall of sceptres and of crowns;
With grisly type did represent
Declining age of government;
And tell with hieroglyphic spade
Its own grave and the state's were made.
* * * *
This sword a dagger had his page,
That was but little for his age;
And therefore waited on him so,
As dwarfs upon knight errants do.

‖ "And straight another with his flambeau
Gave Ralpho o'er the eyes a damn'd blow.
* * * *
That deals in destiny's dark counsels,
And sage opinions of the moon sells."

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by an empty sound like a blow upon a drum-head,* by a pun upon one word,† and by splitting another in two at the end of a verse, with the same alertness and power over the odd and unaccountable in the combinations of sounds as of images.‡

There are as many shrewd aphorisms in his works, clenched by as many quaint and individual allusions, as perhaps in any author whatever. He makes none but palpable hits, that may be said to give one's understanding a rap on the knuckles.§ He is, indeed, sometimes too prolific, and spins his antithetical sentences out, one after another, till the reader, not the author, is wearied. He is, however, very seldom guilty of repetitions, or wordy paraphrases of himself; but he sometimes comes rather too near it, and interrupts the thread of his argument (for narrative he has none) by a tissue of epigrams, and the tagging of points and conundrums without end. The fault, or original sin of his genius, is, that from too much leaven it ferments and runs over; and there is, unfortunately, nothing in his subject to restrain and keep it within compass. He has no story good for anything, and his characters are good for very little. They are too low and mechanical, or too much one thing, personifications, as it were, of nicknames, and bugbears of popular prejudice and vulgar cant, unredeemed by any virtue, or difference or variety of disposition. There is no relaxation or shifting of the parts; and the impression in some degree fails of its effect, and becomes questionable from its being always the same. The satire looks,

* "The mighty Tottipottimoy
Sent to our elders an envoy."

† "For Hebrew *roots*, although they are found
To flourish most in barren ground."

‡ "Those wholesale critics that in coffee-
Houses cry down all philosophy."

§ "This we among ourselves may speak,
But to the wicked or the weak,
We must be cautious to declare
Perfection-truths, such as these are."

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at length, almost like special pleading; it has nothing to confirm it in the apparent good humour or impartiality of the writer. It is something revolting to see an author persecute his characters, the cherished offspring of his brain, in this manner, without mercy. Hudibras and Ralpho have immortalised Butler; and what has he done for them in return, but set them up to be "pilloried on infamy's high and lasting stage?" This is ungrateful!

The rest of the characters have, in general, little more than their names and professions to distinguish them. We scarcely know one from another, Cerdon, or Orsin, or Crowdero, and are often obliged to turn back, to connect their several adventures together. In fact, Butler drives only at a sect of obnoxious opinions, and runs into general declamations. His poem in its essence is a satire, or didactic poem. It is not virtually dramatic or narrative. It is composed of digressions by the author. He instantly breaks off in the middle of a story, or incident, to comment upon and turn it into ridicule. He does not give characters but topics, which would do just as well in his own mouth without agents, or machinery of any kind. The long digression in Part III., in which no mention is made of the hero, is just as good and as much an integrant part of the poem as the rest. The conclusion is lame and impotent, but that is saying nothing; the beginning and middle are equally so as to historical merit. There is no keeping in his characters, as in Don Quixote; nor any enjoyment of the ludicrousness of their situations, as in Hogarth. Indeed, it requires a considerable degree of sympathy to enter into and describe to the life even the ludicrous eccentricities of others, and there is no appearance of sympathy or liking to his subject in Butler. His humour is to his wit, "as one grain of wheat in a bushel of chaff: you shall search all day, and when you find it, it is not worth the trouble." Yet there are exceptions. The most decisive is, I think, the description of the battle between Bruin and his foes, Part I., Canto iii., and again of the triumphal procession in Part II., Canto ii., of which the principal features are copied in Hogarth's election print, the Chairing of the Successful Candidate. The account of Sidrophel and Whackum is

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another instance, and there are some few others, but rarely sprinkled up and down.*

* The following are nearly all I can remember:—

"Thus stopp'd their fury and the basting
Which towards Hudibras was hasting."

It is said of the bear, in the fight with the dogs—

"And setting his right foot before,
He raised himself to show how tall
His person was above them all.
* * * *
At this the knight grew high in chafe,
And staring furiously on Ralph,
He trembled and look'd pale with ire,
Like ashes first, then red as fire.
* * * *
The knight himself did after ride,
Leading Crowdero by his side,
And tow'd him if he lagged behind,
Like boat against the tide and wind."

* * * *

"And raised upon his desperate foot,
On stirrup-side he gazed about.
* * * *
And Hudibras, who used to ponder
On such sights with judicious wonder."

The beginning of the account of the procession in Part II. is as follows:—

"Both thought it was the wisest course
To wave the fight and mount to horse,
And to secure, by swift retreating,
Themselves from danger of worse beating:
Yet neither of them would disparage
By uttering of his mind his courage.
Which made 'em stoutly keep their ground,
With horror and disdain wind-bound.
And now the cause of all their fear
By slow degrees approached so near,
They might distinguish different noise
Of horns and pans, and dogs and boys,
And kettle-drums, whose sullen dub
Sounds like the hooping of a tub."

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The widow, the termagant heroine of the poem, is still more disagreeable than her lover: and her sarcastic account of the passion of love, as consisting entirely in an attachment to land and houses, goods and chattels, which is enforced with all the rhetoric the author is master of, and hunted down through endless similes, is evidently false. The vulgarity and meanness of sentiment which Butler complains of in the Presbyterians, seems at last, from long familiarity and close contemplation, to have tainted his own mind. Their worst vices appear to have taken root in his imagination. Nothing but what was selfish and groveling sunk into his memory, in the depression of a menial situation under his supposed hero. He has, indeed, carried his private grudge too far into his general speculations. He even makes out the rebels to be cowards and well beaten, which does not accord with the history of the times. In an excess of zeal for church and state, he is too much disposed to treat religion as a cheat and liberty as a farce. It was the cant of that day (from which he is not free) to cry down sanctity and sobriety as marks of disaffection, as it is the cant of this to hold them up as proofs of loyalty and staunch monarchical principles. Religion and morality are, in either case, equally subservient to the spirit of party, and a stalking-horse to the love of power. Finally, there is a want of pathos and humour, but no want of interest in Hudibras. It is difficult to lay it down. One thought is inserted into another; the links in the chain of reasoning are so closely rivetted, that the attention seldom flags, but is kept alive (without any other assistance) by the mere force of writing. There are occasional indications of poetical fancy, and an eye for natural beauty; but these are kept under or soon discarded, judiciously enough, but it should seem, not for lack of power, for they are certainly as masterly as they are rare. Such is the burlesque description of the stocks, or allegorical prison, in which first Crowdero and then Hudibras are confined: the passage beginning—

> "As when an owl that's in a barn,
> Sees a mouse creeping in the corn,
> Sits still and shuts his round blue eyes,
> As if he slept," &c.

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And the description of the moon going down in the early morning, which is as pure, original, and picturesque as possible.—

"The queen of night, whose large command
Rules all the sea and half the land,
And over moist and crazy brains
In high spring-tides at midnight reigns,
Was now declining to the west,
To go to bed and take her rest."

Butler is sometimes scholastic, but he makes his learning tell to good account; and for the purposes of burlesque, nothing can be better fitted than the scholastic style.

Butler's 'Remains' are nearly as good and full of sterling genius as his principal poem. Take the following ridicule of the plan of the Greek tragedies as an instance:

"Reduce all tragedy, by rules of art,
Back to its ancient theatre, a cart,
And make them henceforth keep the beaten roads
Of reverend choruses and episodes;
Reform and regulate a puppet-play,
According to the true and ancient way;
That not an actor shall presume to squeak
Unless he have a licence for 't in Greek;
Nor devil in the puppet-play be allowed
To roar and spit fire, but to fright the crowd,
Unless some god or demon chance to have piques
Against an ancient family of Greeks;
That other men may tremble and take warning
Now such a fatal progeny they're born in;
For none but such for tragedy are fitted
That have been ruined only to be pitied;
And only those held proper to deter
Who have th' ill luck against their wills to err;
Whence only such as are of middling sizes,
Betwixt morality and venial vices,
Are qualified to be destroyed by fate,
For other mortals to take warning at."

Upon Critics.

His ridicule of Milton's Latin style is equally severe, but not so well founded.

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I have only to add a few words respecting the dramatic writers about this time, before we arrive at the golden period of our comedy. Those of Etherege* are good for nothing, except 'The Man of Mode,' or 'Sir Fopling Flutter,' which is, I think, a more exquisite and airy picture of the manners of that age than any other extant. Sir Fopling himself is an inimitable coxcomb, but pleasant withal. He is a suit of clothes personified. Dorimant (supposed to be Lord Rochester) is the genius of grace, gallantry, and gaiety. The women in this courtly play have very much the look and air (but something more demure and significant) of Sir Peter Lely's beauties. Harriet, the mistress of Dorimant, who "tames his wild heart to her loving hand," is the flower of the piece. Her natural, untutored grace and spirit, her meeting with Dorimant in the Park, bowing and mimicking him, and the luxuriant description which is given of her fine person, altogether form one of the *chefs-d'œuvre* of dramatic painting. I should think this comedy would bear reviving; and if Mr. Liston were to play Sir Fopling, the part would shine out with double lustre, "like the morn risen on mid-noon." Dryden's comedies have all the point that there is in ribaldry, and all the humour that there is in extravagance. I am sorry I can say nothing better of them. He was not at home in this kind of writing, of which he was himself conscious. His play was *horse-play*. His wit (what there is of it) is ingenious and scholar-like, rather than natural and dramatic. Thus Burr, in the 'Wild Gallant,' says to Failer, "She shall sooner cut an atom than part us." His plots are pure *voluntaries* in absurdity, that bend and shift to his purpose without any previous notice or reason, and are governed by final causes. 'Sir Martin Marall,' which was taken from the Duchess of Newcastle, is the best of his plays, and the origin of the 'Busy Body.' Otway's comedies do no sort of credit to him: on the contrary, they are as desperate as his fortunes. The Duke of Buckingham's famous 'Rehearsal,' which has made, and deservedly, so much noise in the world, is in a great measure taken from Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Knight of the Burning Pestle,' which

* 'Love in a Tub,' and 'She Would if She Could.'

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was written in ridicule of the London apprentices in the reign of Elizabeth, who had a great hand in the critical decisions of that age. There were other dramatic writers of this period, noble and plebeian. I shall only mention one other piece, the 'Committee,' I believe by Sir Robert Howard, which has of late been cut down into the farce called 'Honest Thieves,' and which I remember reading with a great deal of pleasure many years ago.

One cause of the difference between the immediate reception and lasting success of dramatic works at this period may be, that after the court took the play-houses under its particular protection, everything became very much an affair of private patronage. If an author could get a learned lord or a countess-dowager to bespeak a box at his play, and applaud the doubtful passages, he considered his business as done. On the other hand, there was a reciprocity between men of letters and their patrons; critics were "mitigated into courtiers, and submitted," as Mr. Burke has it, "to the soft collar of social esteem," in pronouncing sentence on the works of lords and ladies. How ridiculous this seems now! What a hubbub it would create if it were known that a particular person of fashion and title had taken a front box in order to decide on the fate of a first play! How the newspaper critics would laugh in their sleeves! How the public would sneer! But at this time there was no public. I will not say, therefore, that these times are better than those; but they are better, I think, in this respect. An author now-a-days no longer hangs dangling on the frown of a lord, or the smile of a lady of quality (the one governed perhaps by his valet, and the other by her waiting-maid,) but throws himself boldly, making a lover's leap of it, into the broad lap of public opinion, on which he falls like a feather-bed; and which, like the great bed of Ware, is wide enough to hold us all very comfortably!

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LECTURE IV.

On Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar.

COMEDY is a "graceful ornament to the civil order; the Corinthian capital of polished society." Like the mirrors which have been added to the sides of one of our theatres, it reflects the images of grace, of gaiety, and pleasure double, and completes the perspective of human life. To read a good comedy is to keep the best company in the world, where the best things are said, and the most amusing happen. The wittiest remarks are always ready on the tongue, and the luckiest occasions are always at hand to give birth to the happiest conceptions. Sense makes strange havoc of nonsense. Refinement acts as a foil to affectation, and affectation to ignorance. Sentence after sentence tells. We don't know which to admire most, the observation or the answer to it. We would give our fingers to be able to talk so ourselves, or to hear others talk so. In turning over the pages of the best comedies, we are almost transported to another world, and escape from this dull age to one that was all life, and whim, and mirth, and humour. The curtain rises, and a gayer scene presents itself, as on the canvass of Watteau. We are admitted behind the scenes like spectators at court, on a levee or birthday; but it is the court, the gala day of wit and pleasure, of gallantry and Charles II.! What an air breathes from the name! what a rustling of silks and waving of plumes! what a sparkling of diamond ear-rings and shoe-buckles! What bright eyes, (ah, those were Waller's Sacharissa's as she passed!) what killing looks and graceful motions! How the faces of the whole ring are dressed in smiles! how the repartee goes round! how wit and folly, elegance and awkward imitation of it, set one another off! Happy, thoughtless age, when king and nobles led purely ornamental lives; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study

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went no farther than the choice of a sword-knot, or the adjustment of a side-curl; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing eloquence of dress, and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies, in giddy mazes, through the walks of St. James's Park!

The four principal writers of this style of comedy (which I think the best) are undoubtedly Wycherley, Congreve, Vanbrugh, and Farquhar. The dawn was in Etherege, as its latest close was in Sheridan.—It is hard to say which of these four is best, or in what each of them excels, they had so many and such great excellences.

Congreve is the most distinct from the others, and the most easily defined, both from what he possessed, and from what he wanted. He had by far the most wit and elegance, with less of other things, of humour, character, incident, &c. His style is inimitable, nay perfect. It is the highest model of comic dialogue. Every sentence is replete with sense and satire, conveyed in the most polished and pointed terms. Every page presents a shower of brilliant conceits, is a tissue of epigrams in prose, is a new triumph of wit, a new conquest over dulness. The fire of artful raillery is nowhere else so well kept up. This style, which he was almost the first to introduce, and which he carried to the utmost pitch of classical refinement, reminds one exactly of Collins's description of wit as opposed to humour,

> "Whose jewels in his crisped hair
> Are placed each other's light to share."

Sheridan will not bear a comparison with him in the regular antithetical construction of his sentences, and in the mechanical artifices of his style, though so much later, and though style in general has been so much studied, and in the mechanical part so much improved since then. It bears every mark of being what he himself in the dedication of one of his plays tells us that it was, a spirited copy taken off and carefully revised from the most select society of his time, exhibiting all the sprightliness, ease, and animation of familiar conversation, with the correctness and delicacy of the most finished composition. His works are a singular treat to those who have cultivated a taste for the

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niceties of English style: there is a peculiar flavour in the very words, which is to be found in hardly any other writer. To the mere reader his writings would be an irreparable loss: to the stage they are already become a dead letter, with the exception of one of them, 'Love for Love.' This play is as full of character, incident, and stage-effect, as almost any of those of his contemporaries, and fuller of wit than any of his own, except perhaps the 'Way of the World.' It still acts, and is still acted well. The effect of it is prodigious on the well-informed spectator. In particular, Munden's Foresight, if it is not just the thing, is a wonderfully rich and powerful piece of comic acting. His look is planet-struck; his dress and appearance like one of the signs of the Zodiac taken down. Nothing can be more bewildered; and it only wants a little more helplessness, a little more of the doating, querulous garrulity of age, to be all that one conceives of the superannuated, star-gazing original. The gay, unconcerned opinion of this play, and the romantic generosity of the conclusion, where Valentine, when about to resign his mistress, declares—"I never valued fortune, but as it was subservient to my pleasure; and my only pleasure was to please this lady,"—are alike admirable. The peremptory bluntness and exaggerated descriptions of Sir Sampson Legend are in a vein truly oriental, with a Shakspearian cast of language, and form a striking contrast to the quaint credulity and senseless superstitions of Foresight. The remonstrance of his son to him, "to divest him, along with his inheritance, of his reason, thoughts, passions, inclinations, affections, appetites, senses, and the huge train of attendants which he brought into the world with him," with his valet's accompanying comments, is one of the most eloquent and spirited specimens of wit, pathos, and morality, that is to be found. The short scene with Trapland, the money-broker, is of the first water. What a picture is here drawn of Tattle! "More misfortunes, Sir!" says Jeremy. *Valentine.* "What, another dun?" *Jeremy.* "No, Sir, but Mr. Tattle is come to wait upon you." What an introduction to give of an honest gentleman in the shape of a misfortune! The scenes between him, Miss Prue, and Ben, are of a highly coloured description. Mrs. Frail and Mrs. Foresight are "sis-

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ters every way;" and the bodkin which Mrs. Foresight brings as a proof of her sister's levity of conduct, and which is so convincingly turned against her as a demonstration of her own—"Nay, if you come to that, where did you find that bodkin?"—is one of the trophies of the moral justice of the comic drama. The 'Old Bachelor' and 'Double Dealer' are inferior to 'Love for Love,' but one is never tired of reading them. The fault of the last is, that Lady Touchwood approaches, in the turbulent impetuosity of her character, and measured tone of her declamation, too near to the tragedy-queen; and that Maskwell's plots puzzle the brain by their intricacy, as they stagger our belief by their gratuitous villany. Sir Paul and Lady Pliant, and my Lord and Lady Froth, are also scarcely credible in the extravagant insipidity and romantic vein of their follies, in which they are notably seconded by the lively Mr. Brisk and "dying Ned Careless."

The 'Way of the World' was the author's last and most carefully finished performance. It is an essence almost too fine; and the sense of pleasure evaporates in an aspiration after something that seems too exquisite ever to have been realised. After inhaling the spirit of Congreve's wit, and tasting "love's thrice reputed nectar" in his works, the head grows giddy in turning from the highest point of rapture to the ordinary business of life; and we can with difficulty recal the truant Fancy to those objects which we are fain to take up with here, *for better, for worse.* What can be more enchanting than Millamant and her morning thoughts, her *doux sommeils?* What more provoking than her reproach to her lover, who proposes to rise early, "Ah! idle creature!" The meeting of these two lovers, after the abrupt dismissal of Sir Wilful, is the height of careless and voluptuous elegance, as if they moved in air, and drank a finer spirit of humanity.

> "*Millamant.* Like Phœbus sung the no less amorous boy.
> *Mirabell.* Like Daphne she, as lovely and as coy.

Millamant is the perfect model of the accomplished fine lady:

> "Come, then, the colours and the ground prepare,
> Dip in the rainbow, trick her off in air;
> Choose a firm cloud, before it falls, and in it
> Catch ere she change, the Cynthia of a minute."

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She is the ideal heroine of the comedy of high life, who arrives at the height of indifference to everything from the height of satisfaction; to whom pleasure is as familiar as the air she draws; elegance worn as a part of her dress; wit the habitual language which she hears and speaks; love, a matter of course; and who has nothing to hope or to fear, her own caprice being the only law to herself, and rule to those about her. Her words seem composed of amorous sighs—her looks are glanced at prostrate admirers or envious rivals.

> "If there's delight in love, 'tis when I see
> That heart that others bleed for, bleed for me."

She refines on her pleasures to satiety; and is almost stifled in the incense that is offered to her person, her wit, her beauty, and her fortune. Secure of triumph, her slaves tremble at her frown: her charms are so irresistible, that her conquests give her neither surprise nor concern. "Beauty the lover's gift?" she exclaims, in an answer to Mirabell—"Dear me, what is a lover that it can give? Why one makes lovers as fast as one pleases, and they live as long as one pleases, and they die as soon as one pleases; and then if one pleases, one makes more." We are not sorry to see her tamed down at last, from her pride of love and beauty into a wife. She is good-natured and generous, with all her temptations to the contrary; and her behaviour to Mirabell reconciles us to her treatment of Witwoud and Petulant, and of her country admirer, Sir Wilful.

Congreve has described all this in his character of Millamant, but he has done no more; and if he had, he would have done wrong. He has given us the finest idea of an artificial character of this kind; but it is still the reflection of an artificial character. The springs of nature, passion, or imagination are but feebly touched. The impressions appealed to, and with masterly address, are habitual, external, and conventional advantages; the ideas of birth, of fortune, of connexions, of dress, accomplishment, fashion, the opinion of the world, of crowds of admirers, continually come into play, flatter our vanity, bribe our interest, soothe our indolence, fall in with our prejudices;—it is these that support the goddess of our idolatry, with which

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she is every thing, and without which she would be nothing. The mere fine lady of comedy, compared with the heroine of romance or poetry, when stripped of her adventitious ornaments and advantages, is too much like the doll stripped of its finery. In thinking of Millamant, we think almost as much of her dress as of her person: it is not so with respect to Rosalind or Perdita. The poet has painted them differently; in colours which "nature's own sweet and cunning hand laid on," with health, with innocence, with gaiety, "wild wit, invention ever new;" with pure red and white, like the wilding's blossoms; with warbled wood-notes, like the feathered choir's; with thoughts fluttering on the wings of imagination, and hearts panting and breathless with eager delight. The interest we feel is in themselves; the admiration they excite is for themselves. They do not depend upon the drapery of circumstances. It is nature that "blazons herself" in them. Imogen is the same in a lonely cave as in a court; nay more, for she there seems something heavenly—a spirit or a vision; and, as it were, shames her destiny, brighter for the foil of circumstances. Millamant is nothing but a fine lady; and all her airs and affectation would be blown away with the first breath of misfortune. Enviable in drawing rooms, adorable at her toilette, fashion, like a witch, has thrown its spell around her; but if that spell were broken, her power of fascination would be gone. For that reason I think the character better adapted for the stage: it is more artificial, more theatrical, more meretricious. I would rather have seen Mrs. Abington's Millamant than any Rosalind that ever appeared on the stage. Somehow, this sort of acquired elegance is more a thing of costume, of air and manner; and in comedy, or on the comic stage, the light and familiar, the trifling, superficial and agreeable, bears, perhaps, rightful sway over that which touches the affections, or exhausts the fancy.—There is a callousness in the worst characters in the 'Way of the World,' in Fainall, and his wife, and Mrs. Marwood, not very pleasant; and a grossness in the absurd ones, such as Lady Wishfort and Sir Wilful, which is not a little amusing. Witwoud wishes to disclaim, as far as he can, his relationship to this last character, and says, "he's but his half brother;" to

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which Mirabell makes answer—"Then, perhaps, he's but half a fool." Peg is an admirable caricature of rustic awkwardness and simplicity, which is carried to excess without any offence, from a sense of contrast to the refinement of the chief characters in the play. The description of Lady Wishfort's face is a perfect piece of painting. The force of style in this author at times amounts to poetry. Waitwell, who personates Sir Rowland, and Foible, his accomplice in the matrimonial scheme upon her mistress, hang as a dead weight upon the plot. They are mere tools in the hands of Mirabell, and want life and interest. Congreve's characters can all of them speak well, they are mere machines when they come to act. Our author's superiority deserted him almost entirely with his wit. His serious and tragic poetry is frigid and *jejune* to an unaccountable degree. His *forte* was the description of actual manners, whether elegant or absurd; and when he could not deride the one or embellish the other, his attempts at romantic passion or imaginary enthusiasm are forced, abortive, and ridiculous, or commonplace. The description of the ruins of a temple in the beginning of the 'Mourning Bride,' was a great stretch of his poetic genius. It has, however, been over-rated, particularly by Dr. Johnson, who could have done nearly as well himself for a single passage, in the same style of moralising and sentimental description. To justify this general censure, and to show how the lightest and most graceful wit degenerates into the heaviest and most bombastic poetry, I will give one description out of his tragedy which will be enough. It is the speech which Gonsalez addresses to Almeria:

"Be every day of your long life like this.
The sun, bright conquest, and your brighter eyes
Have all conspired to blaze promiscuous light,
And bless this day with most unequal lustre.
Your royal father, my victorious lord,
Loaden with spoils and ever-living laurel,
Is entering now, in martial pomp, the palace.
Five hundred mules precede his solemn march,
Which groan beneath the weight of Moorish wealth.
Chariots of war, adorned with glittering gems,
Succeed; and next, a hundred neighing steeds,

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White as the fleecy rain on Alpine hills;
That bound, and foam, and champ the golden bit,
As they disdain'd the victory they grace.
Prisoners of war in shining fetters follow:
And captains of the noblest blood of Afric
Sweat by his chariot-wheels, and lick and grind,
With gnashing teeth, the dust his triumphs raise.
The swarming populace spread every wall,
And cling, as if with claws they did enforce
Their hold, through clifted stones stretching and staring
As if they were all eyes, and every limb
Would feed its faculty of admiration,
While you alone retire, and shun this sight;
This sight, which is indeed not seen (though twice
The multitude should gaze) in absence of your eyes."

This passage seems, in part, an imitation of Bolingbroke's 'Entry into London.' The style is as different from Shakspeare as it is from that of Witwoud and Petulant. It is plain that the imagination of the author could not raise itself above the burlesque. His 'Mask of Semele,' 'Judgment of Paris,' and other occasional poems, are even worse. I would not advise any one to read them, or if I did, they would not.

Wycherley was before Congreve; and his 'Country Wife' will last longer than anything of Congreve's as a popular acting play. It is only a pity that it is not entirely his own; but it is enough so to do him never-ceasing honour, for the best things are his own. His humour is, in general, broader, his characters more natural, and his incidents more striking than Congreve's. It may be said of Congreve, that the workmanship overlays the materials: in Wycherley, the casting of the parts and the fable are alone sufficient to ensure success. We forget Congreve's characters, and only remember what they say: we remember Wycherley's characters, and the incidents they meet with, just as if they were real, and forget what they say, comparatively speaking. Miss Peggy (or Mrs. Margery Pinchwife) is a character that will last for ever, I should hope; and even when the original is no more, if that should ever be, while self-will, curiosity, art, and ignorance are to be found in the same person, it will be just as good and as intelligible as ever in the

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description, because it is built on first principles, and brought out in the fullest and broadest manner. Agnes, in Moliere's play, has a great deal of the same unconscious impulse and heedless *naïveté*, but hers is sentimentalised and varnished over (in the French fashion) with long-winded apologies and analytical distinctions. It wants the same simple force and home truth. It is not so direct and downright. Miss Peggy is not even a novice in casuistry: she blurts out her meaning before she knows what she is saying, and she speaks her mind by her actions oftener than by her words. The outline of the plot is the same; but the point-blank hits and master-strokes, the sudden thoughts and delightful expedients, such as her changing the letters, the meeting her husband plump in the park, as she is running away from him as fast as her heels can carry her, her being turned out of doors by her jealous booby of a husband, and sent by him to her lover disguised as Alicia, her sister-in-law—occur first in the modern play. There are scarcely any incidents or situations on the stage, which tell like these for pantomimic effect, which give such a tingling to the blood, or so completely take away the breath with expectation and surprise. Miss Prue, in 'Love for Love,' is a lively reflection of Miss Peggy, but without the bottom and weight of metal. Hoyden is a match for her in constitution and complete effect, as Corinna, in 'The Confederacy,' is in mischief, but without the wit. Mrs. Jordan used to play all these characters; and as she played them, it was hard to know which was best. Pinchwife, or Moody (as he is at present called,) is, like others of Wycherley's moral characters, too rustic, abrupt, and cynical. He is a more disagreeable, but less tedious character than the husband of Agnes, and both seem, by all accounts, to have been rightly served. The character of Sparkish is quite new, and admirably hit off. He is an exquisite and suffocating coxcomb; a pretender to wit and letters, without common understanding, or the use of his senses. The class of character is thoroughly exposed and understood; but he persists in his absurd conduct so far, that it becomes extravagant and disgusting, if not incredible, from mere weakness and foppery. Yet there is something in him that we are inclined to tolerate at first, as his professing that "with him a wit is the first

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title to respect;" and we regard his unwillingness to be pushed out of the room, and coming back in spite of their teeth, to keep the company of wits and railers, as a favorable omen. But he utterly disgraces his pretensions before he has done. With all his faults and absurdities, he is, however, a much less offensive character than Tattle. Horner is a stretch of probability in the first concoction of that ambiguous character (for he does not appear at present on the stage as Wycherley made him;) but notwithstanding the indecency and indirectness of the means he employs to carry his plans into effect, he deserves every sort of consideration and forgiveness both for the display of his own ingenuity, and the deep insight he discovers into human nature —such as it was in the time of Wycherley. The author has commented on this character, and the double meaning of the name in his 'Plain Dealer,' borrowing the remarks, and almost the very words of Moliere, who has brought forward and defended his own work against the objections of the precise part of his audience, in his *Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes*. There is no great harm in these occasional plagiarisms, except that they make one uncomfortable at other times, and distrustful of the originality of the whole. The 'Plain Dealer' is Wycherley's next best work, and is a most severe and poignant moral satire. There is a heaviness about it, indeed, an extravagance, an overdoing both in the style, the plot, and characters, but the truth of feeling and the force of interest prevail over every objection. The character of Manly, the Plain Dealer, is violent, repulsive, and uncouth, which is a fault, though one that seems to have been intended for the sake of contrast; for the portrait of consummate, artful hypocrisy in Olivia, is, perhaps, rendered more striking by it. The indignation excited against this odious and pernicious quality by the masterly exposure to which it is here subjected, is "a discipline of humanity." No one can read this play attentively without being the better for it as long as he lives. It penetrates to the core; it shows the immorality and hateful effects of duplicity, by showing it fixing its harpy fangs in the heart of an honest and worthy man. It is worth ten volumes of sermons. The scenes between Manly after his return, Olivia, Plausible, and Novel, are instructive examples of unblushing

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impudence, of shallow pretensions to principle, and of the most mortifying reflections on his own situation, and bitter sense of female injustice and ingratitude, on the part of Manly. The devil of hypocrisy and hardened assurance seems worked up to the highest pitch of conceivable effrontery in Olivia, when, after confiding to her cousin the story of her infamy, she, in a moment, turns round upon her for some sudden purpose, and affecting not to know the meaning of the other's allusions to what she has just told her, reproaches her with forging insinuations to the prejudice of her character, and in violation of their friendship. "Go! you're a censorious ill woman." This is more trying to the patience than anything in the 'Tartuffe.' The name of this heroine, and her overtures to Fidelia as the page, seem to have been suggested by 'Twelfth Night.' It is curious to see how the same subject is treated by two such different authors as Shakspeare and Wycherley. The widow Blackacre and her son are, like her lawsuit—everlasting. A more lively, palpable, bustling, ridiculous picture cannot be drawn. Jerry is a hopeful lad, though undutiful, and gets out of bad hands into worse. Goldsmith evidently had an eye to these two precious characters in 'She Stoops to Conquer.' Tony Lumpkin and his mother are of the same family, and the incident of the theft of the casket of jewels, and the bag of parchments, is nearly the same in both authors. Wycherley's other plays are not so good. The 'Gentleman Dancing Master' is a long, foolish farce, in the exaggerated manner of Moliere, but without his spirit or whimsical invention. 'Love in a Wood,' though not what one would wish it to be for the author's sake or our own, is much better, and abounds in several rich and highly-coloured scenes, particularly those in which Miss Lucy, her mother Crossbite, Dapperwit, and Alderman Gripe are concerned. Some of the subordinate characters and intrigues in this comedy are grievously spun out. Wycherley, when he got hold of a good thing, or sometimes even of a bad one, was determined to make the most of it; and might have said with Dogberry, truly enough, "Had I the tediousness of a king, I could find in my heart to bestow it all upon your worships." In reading this author's best works, those which one reads most frequently over, and knows almost

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by heart, one cannot help thinking of the treatment he received from Pope about his verses. It was hardly excusable in a boy of sixteen to an old man of seventy.

Vanbrugh comes next, and holds his own fully with the best. He is no writer at all, as to mere authorship; but he makes up for it by a prodigious fund of comic invention and ludicrous description, bordering somewhat on caricature. Though he did not borrow from him, he was much more like Moliere in genius than Wycherley was, who professedly imitated him. He has none of Congreve's graceful refinement, and as little of Wycherley's serious manner and studied insight into the springs of character; but his exhibition of it in dramatic contrast and unlooked-for situations, where the different parties play upon one another's failings, and into one another's hands, keeping up the jest like a game at battledore and shuttlecock, and urging it to the utmost verge of breathless extravagance, in the mere eagerness of the fray, is beyond that of any other of our writers. His fable is not so profoundly laid, nor his characters so well digested, as Wycherley's (who, in these respects, bore some resemblance to Fielding.) Vanbrugh does not lay the same deliberate train from the outset to the conclusion, so that the whole may hang together, and tend inevitably from the combination of different agents and circumstances to the same decisive point; but he works out scene after scene on the spur of the occasion, and from the immediate hold they take of his imagination at the moment, without any previous bias or ultimate purpose, much more powerfully, with more *verve*, and in a richer vein of original invention. His fancy warms and burnishes out as if he were engaged in the real scene of action, and felt all his faculties suddenly called forth to meet the emergency. He has more nature than art; what he does best, he does because he cannot help it. He has a masterly eye to the advantages which certain accidental situations of character present to him on the spot, and executes the most difficult and rapid theatrical movements at a moment's warning. Of this kind are the inimitable scenes in the 'Provoked Wife,' between Razor and Mademoiselle, where they repeat and act over again the rencontre in the Mulberry walk between Constant and his mistress, than which nothing was ever

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more happily conceived, or done to more absolute perfection; that again in the 'Relapse,' where Loveless pushes Berinthia into the closet; the sudden meeting, in the 'Confederacy,' between Dick and Mrs. Amlet; the altercation about the letter between Flippanta and Corinna, in the same play, and that again where Brass, at the house of Gripe the money-scrivener, threatens to discover his friend and accomplice, and by talking louder and louder to him, as he tries to evade his demands, extorts a grudging submission from him. This last scene is as follows:—

"*Dick.* I wish my old hobbling mother han't been blabbing something here she should not do.

Brass. Fear nothing, all's safe on that side yet. But how speaks young mistress's epistle? soft and tender?

Dick. As pen can write.

Brass. So you think all goes well there?

Dick. As my heart can wish.

Brass. You are sure on't?

Dick. Sure on't.

Brass. Why then, ceremony aside—[*putting on his hat*]—you and I must have a little talk, Mr. Amlet.

Dick. Ah, Brass, what art thou going to do? wo't ruin me?

Brass. Look you, Dick, few words; you are in a smooth way of making your fortune; I hope all will roll on. But how do you intend matters shall pass 'twixt you and me in this business?

Dick. Death and furies! What a time dost take to talk on't?

Brass. Good words, or I betray you; they have already heard of one Mr. Amlet in the house.

Dick. Here's a son of a whore. [*Aside.*

Brass. In short, look smooth, and be a good prince. I am your valet, 'tis true: your footman sometimes, which I'm enraged at; but you have always had the ascendant, I confess: when we were schoolfellows, you made me carry your books, make your exercise, own your rogueries, and sometimes take a whipping for you. When we were fellow-'prentices, though I was your senior, you made me open the shop, clean my master's shoes, cut last at dinner, and eat all the crust. In our sins, too, I must own you still kept me under; you soar'd up to adultery with the mistress, while I was at humble fornication with the maid. Nay, in our punishments you still made good your post; for when once upon a time I was sentenced but to be whipp'd, I cannot deny but you were condemned to be hang'd. So that in all times, I must confess, your inclinations have been greater and nobler than mine; however, I cannot consent that you should at once fix fortune for life, and I dwell in my humilities for the rest of my days.

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Dick. Hark thee, Brass, if I do not most nobly by thee, I'm a dog.

Brass. And when?

Dick. As soon as ever I am married.

Brass. Ay, the plague take thee.

Dick. Then you mistrust me?

Brass. I do, by my faith. Look you, Sir, some folks we mistrust, because we don't know them: others we mistrust, because we do know them: and for one of these reasons I desire there may be a bargain beforehand: if not [*raising his voice,*] look ye, Dick Amlet—

Dick. Soft, my dear friend and companion. The dog will ruin me [*Aside.*] Say, what is't will content thee?

Brass. O ho!

Dick. But how canst thou be such a barbarian?

Brass. I learnt it at Algiers.

Dick. Come, make thy Turkish demand then.

Brass. You know you gave me a bank-bill this morning to receive for you.

Dick. I did so, of fifty pounds; 'tis thine. So now thou art satisfied; all is fixed.

Brass. It is not, indeed. There's a diamond necklace you robb'd your mother of e'en now.

Dick. Ah, you Jew!

Brass. No words.

Dick. My dear Brass.

Brass. I insist.

Dick. My old friend!

Brass. Dick Amlet [*raising his voice,*] I insist.

Dick. Ah, the cormorant [*Aside.*] Well, 'tis thine; thou'lt never thrive with it.

Brass. When I find it begins to do me mischief, I'll give it you back again. But I must have a wedding suit.

Dick. Well.

Brass. A stock of linen.

Dick. Enough.

Brass. Not yet——a silver-hilted sword.

Dick. Well, thou shalt have that too. Now thou hast everything.

Brass. Heav'n forgive me, I forgot a ring of remembrance. I would not forget all these favours for the world; a sparkling diamond will be always playing in my eye, and put me in mind of them.

Dick. This unconscionable rogue [*Aside.*] Well, I'll bespeak one for thee.

Brass. Brilliant.

Dick. It shall. But if the thing don't succeed after all—

Brass. I am a man of honour and restore; and so, the treaty being finished, I strike my flag of defiance, and fall into my respects again."

[*Takes off his hat.*

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The 'Confederacy' is a comedy of infinite contrivance and intrigue, with a matchless spirit of impudence. It is a fine careless *exposé* of heartless want of principle; for there is no anger or severity against vice expressed in it, as in Wycherley. The author's morality in all cases except his 'Provoked Wife' (which was undertaken as a penance for past peccadillos,) sits very loose upon him. It is a little upon the turn; "it does somewhat smack." Old Palmer, as Dick Amlet, asking his mother's blessing on his knee, was the very idea of a graceless son. His sweetheart Corinna is a Miss Prue, but nature works in her more powerfully. Lord Foppington, in 'The Relapse,' is a most splendid caricature: he is a personification of the foppery and folly of dress and external appearance in full feather. He blazes out and dazzles sober reason with ridiculous ostentation. Still I think this character is a copy from Etherege's Sir Fopling Flutter, and upon the whole, perhaps, Sir Fopling is the more natural grotesque of the two. His soul is more in his dress; he is a more disinterested coxcomb. The lord is an ostentatious, strutting, vain-glorious blockhead; the knight is an unaffected, self-complacent, serious admirer of his equipage and person. For instance, what they severally say on the subject of contemplating themselves in the glass is a proof of this. Sir Fopling thinks a looking-glass in the room "the best company in the world;" it is another self to him: Lord Foppington merely considers it as necessary to adjust his appearance, that he may make a figure in company. The finery of the one has an imposing air of grandeur about it, and is studied for effect: the other is really in love with a laced suit, and is hand and glove with the newest-cut fashion. He really thinks his tailor or peruke-maker the greatest man in the world, while his lordship treats them familiarly, as necessary appendages of his person. Still this coxcomb-nobleman's effeminacy and mock-heroic vanity are admirably depicted, and held up to unrivalled ridicule; and his courtship of Miss Hoyden is excellent in all its stages, and ends oracularly:—

Lord Foppington. Now, for my part, I think the wisest thing a man can do with an aching heart, is to put on a serene countenance; for a philosophical air is the most becoming thing in the world to the face of a person

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of quality: I will therefore bear my disgrace like a great man, and let the people see I am above an affront. [*Then turning to his brother.*] Dear Tam, since things are thus fallen out, pr'ythee give me leave to wish thee joy; I do it *de bon cœur*, strike me dumb: you have married a woman beautiful in her person, charming in her airs, prudent in her conduct, constant in her inclinations, and of a nice morality—stap my vitals!

Poor Hoyden fares ill in his lordship's description of her, though she could expect no better at his hands for her desertion of him. She wants sentiment, to be sure, but she has other qualifications—she is a fine bouncing piece of flesh and blood. Her first announcement is decisive—"Let loose the greyhound, and lock up Hoyden." Her declaration, "It's well they've got me a husband, or, ecod, I'd marry the baker," comes from her mouth like a shot from a culverin, and leaves no doubt, by its effect upon the ear, that she would have made it good in the sequel, if she had not been provided for. Her indifference to the man she is to marry, and her attachment to the finery and the title, are justified by an attentive observation of nature in its simplest guise. There is, however, no harm in Hoyden; she merely wishes to consult her own inclination: she is by no means like Corinna in 'The Confederacy,' "a devilish girl at the bottom," nor is it her great delight to plague other people.—Sir Tunbelly Clumsy is the right worshipful and worthy father of so delicate an offspring. He is a coarse, substantial contrast to the flippant and flimsy Lord Foppington. If the one is not without reason "proud to be at the head of so prevailing a party" as that of coxcombs, the other may look big and console himself (under some affronts) with being a very competent representative of the once formidable, though now obsolete class of country squires, who had no idea beyond the boundaries of their own estates, or the circumference of their own persons. His unwieldy dulness gives, by the rule of contraries, a lively sense of lightness and grace: his stupidity answers all the purposes of wit. His portly paunch repels a jest like a woolsack: a sarcasm rebounds from him like a ball. His presence is a cure for gravity; and he is a standing satire upon himself and the class in natural history to which he belonged.—Sir John Brute, in 'The Provoked Wife,' is an animal of the same English growth, but of a cross-grained

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breed. He has a spice of the demon mixed up with the brute; is mischievous as well as stupid; has improved his natural parts by a town education and example; opposes the fine-lady airs and graces of his wife by brawling oaths, impenetrable surliness, and pot-house valour; overpowers any tendency she might have to vapours or hysterics by the fumes of tobacco and strong beer; and thinks to be master in his own house by roaring in taverns, reeling home drunk every night, breaking lamps, and beating the watch. He does not, however, find this lordly method answer. He turns out to be a coward as well as a bully, and dares not resent the injuries he has provoked by his unmanly behaviour. This was Garrick's favourite part; and I have heard that his acting in the drunken scene, in which he was disguised not as a clergyman, but as a woman of the town, which was an alteration of his own to suit the delicacy of the times, was irresistible. The ironical conversations in this play between Belinda and Lady Brute, as well as those in 'The Relapse' between Amanda and her cousin Berinthia, will do to compare with Congreve in the way of wit and studied raillery, but they will not stand the comparison. Araminta and Clarissa keep up the ball between them with more spirit, for their conversation is very like that of kept-mistresses; and the mixture of fashionable *slang* and professed want of principle gives a sort of zest and high seasoning to their confidential communications, which Vanbrugh could supply as well as anybody. But he could not do without the taint of grossness and licentiousness. Lady Townly is not really the vicious character, nor quite the fine lady, which the author would have her to be. Lady Grace is so far better; she is what she pretends to be, merely *sober* and insipid.—Vanbrugh's *forte* was not the sentimental or didactic; his genius flags and grows dull when it is not put into action, and wants the stimulus of sudden emergency, or the fortuitous collision of different motives, to call out all his force and vivacity. His antitheses are happy and brilliant contrasts of character; his *double entendres* equivocal situations; his best jokes are practical devices, not epigrammatic conceits. His wit is that which is emphatically called *mother-wit*. It brings those who possess it, or to whom he lends it, into scrapes by its restlessness, and brings

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them out of them by its alacrity. Several of his favourite characters are knavish, adroit adventurers, who have all the gipsy jargon, the cunning impudence, cool presence of mind, selfishness, and indefatigable industry; all the excuses, lying, dexterity, the intellectual juggling and legerdemain tricks, necessary to fit them for this sort of predatory warfare on the simplicity, follies, or vices of mankind. He discovers the utmost dramatic generalship in bringing off his characters at a pinch, and by an instantaneous *ruse de guerre*, when the case seems hopeless in any other hands. The train of his associations, to express the same thing in metaphysical language, lies in following the suggestions of his fancy into every possible connexion of cause and effect, rather than into every possible combination of likeness or difference. His ablest characters show that they are so by displaying their ingenuity, address, and presence of mind in critical junctures, and in their own affairs, rather than their wisdom or their wit "in intellectual gladiatorship," or in speculating on the affairs and characters of other people.

Farquhar's chief characters are also adventurers; but they are adventurers of a romantic, not a knavish stamp, and succeed no less by their honesty than their boldness. They conquer their difficulties, and effect their "hair-breadth 'scapes" by the impulse of natural enthusiasm and the confidence of high principles of gallantry and honour, as much as by their dexterity and readiness at expedients. They are real gentlemen, and only pretended impostors. Vanbrugh's upstart heroes are without "any relish of salvation," without generosity, virtue, or any pretensions to it. We have little sympathy for them, and no respect at all. But we have every sort of good-will towards Farquhar's heroes, who have as many peccadillos to answer for, and play as many rogue's tricks, but are honest fellows at bottom. I know little other difference between these two capital writers and copyists of nature, than that Farquhar's nature is the better nature of the two. We seem to like both the author and his favourites. He has humour, character, and invention, in common with the other, with a more unaffected gaiety and spirit of enjoyment, which overflows and sparkles in all he does. He makes us laugh from pleasure oftener than from malice. He some-

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where prides himself in having introduced on the stage the class of comic heroes here spoken of, which has since become a standard character, and which represents the warm-hearted, rattle-brained, thoughtless, high-spirited young fellow, who floats on the back of his misfortunes without repining, who forfeits appearances, but saves his honour—and he gives us to understand that it was his own. He did not need to be ashamed of it. Indeed there is internal evidence that this sort of character is his own, for it pervades his works generally, and is the moving spirit that informs them. His comedies have on this account probably a greater appearance of truth and nature than almost any others. His incidents succeed one another with rapidity, but without premeditation; his wit is easy and spontaneous; his style animated, unembarrassed, and flowing; his characters full of life and spirit, and never overstrained so as to "o'erstep the modesty of nature," though they sometimes, from haste and carelessness, seem left in a crude, unfinished state. There is a constant ebullition of gay, laughing invention, cordial good humour, and fine animal spirits, in his writings.

Of the four writers here classed together, we should perhaps have courted Congreve's acquaintance most, for his wit and the elegance of his manners; Wycherley's, for his sense and observation on human nature; Vanbrugh's, for his power of farcical description and telling a story; Farquhar's, for the pleasure of his society, and the love of good fellowship. His fine gentlemen are not gentlemen of fortune and fashion, like those in Congreve, but are rather "God Almighty's gentlemen." His valets are good fellows: even his chambermaids are, some of them, disinterested and sincere. But his fine ladies, it must be allowed, are not so amiable, so witty, or accomplished, as those in Congreve. Perhaps they both described women in high-life as they found them: Congreve took their conversation, Farquhar their conduct. In the way of fashionable vice and petrifying affectation, there is nothing to come up to his Lady Lurewell, in 'The Trip to the Jubilee.' She by no means makes good Mr. Burke's courtly and chivalrous observation, that the evil of vice consists principally in its want of refinement; and one benefit of the dramatic exhibition of such characters is, that they overturn

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false maxims of morality, and settle accounts fairly and satisfactorily between theory and practice. Her lover, Colonel Standard, is indeed an awkward incumbrance upon so fine a lady; it was a character that the poet did not like; and he has merely sketched him in, leaving him to answer for himself as well as he could, which is but badly. We have no suspicion, either from his conduct, or from any hint dropped by accident, that he is the first seducer and the possessor of the virgin affections of Lady Lurewell. The double transformation of his virago from vice to virtue, and from virtue to vice again, her plausible pretensions and artful wiles, her violent temper and dissolute passions, show a thorough knowledge of the effects both of nature and habit in making up human character. Farquhar's own heedless turn for gallantry would be likely to throw him upon such a character; and his goodness of heart and sincerity of disposition would teach him to expose its wanton duplicity and gilded rottenness. Lurewell is almost as abandoned a character as Olivia, in 'The Plain Dealer;' but the indignation excited against her is of a less serious and tragic cast. Her peevish disgust and affected horror at everything that comes near her, form a very edifying picture. Her dissatisfaction and *ennui* are not mere airs and graces worn for fashion's sake, but are real and tormenting inmates of her breast, arising from a surfeit of pleasure and the consciousness of guilt. All that is hateful in the caprice, ill humour, spite, *hauteur*, folly, impudence, and affectation of the complete woman of quality, is contained in the scene between her and her servants in the first act. The depravity would be intolerable, even in imagination, if the weakness were not ludicrous in the extreme. It shows, in the highest degree, the power of circumstances and example to pervert the understanding, the imagination, and even the senses. The manner in which the character of the gay, wild, free-hearted, but not altogether profligate or unfeeling Sir Harry Wildair, is played off against the designing, vindictive, imperious, uncontrollable, and unreasonable humours of Lurewell, in the scene where she tries to convince him of his wife's infidelity, while he stops his ears to her pretended proofs, is not surpassed in modern comedy. I shall give it here:—

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Wildair. Now, dear Madam, I have secured my brother, you have disposed of the Colonel, and we'll rail at love till we ha'n't a word more to say.

Lurewell. Ay, Sir Harry. Please to sit a little, Sir. You must know I'm in a strange humour of asking you some questions. How did you like your Lady, pray, Sir?

Wild. Like her! Ha, ha, ha! So very well, faith, that for her very sake I'm in love with every woman I meet.

Lure. And did matrimony please you extremely?

Wild. So very much, that if polygamy were allowed I would have a new wife every day.

Lure. Oh, Sir Harry! this is raillery. But your serious thoughts upon the matter, pray.

Wild. Why then, Madam, to give you my true sentiments of wedlock: I had a lady that I married by chance—she was virtuous by chance—and I loved her by great chance. Nature gave her beauty, education an air; and fortune threw a young fellow, five-and-twenty, in her lap. I courted her all day, loved her all night; she was my mistress one day and my wife another; I found in one the variety of a thousand, and the very confinement of marriage gave me the pleasure of change.

Lure. And she was very virtuous.

Wild. Look ye, Madam, you know she was beautiful. She had good nature about her mouth, the smile of beauty in her cheeks, sparkling wit in her forehead, and sprightly love in her eyes.

Lure. Pshaw! I knew her very well; the woman was well enough. But you don't answer my question, Sir.

Wild. So, Madam, as I told you before, she was young and beautiful, I was rich and vigorous; my estate gave a lustre to my love, and a swing to our enjoyment; round, like the ring that made us one, our golden pleasures circled without end.

Lure. Golden pleasures! Golden fiddlesticks! What dy'e tell me of your canting stuff? Was she virtuous, I say?

Wild. Ready to burst with envy; but I will torment thee a little [*Aside.*] So, Madam, I powdered to please her, she dressed to engage me; we toyed away the morning in amorous nonsense, lolled away the evening in the park or the playhouse, and all the night—hem!

Lure. Look ye, Sir, answer my question, or I shall take it ill.

Wild. Then, Madam, there was never such a pattern of unity. Her wants were still prevented by my supplies; my own heart whispered me her desires, 'cause she herself was there; no contention ever rose, but the dear strife of who should most oblige; no noise about authority; for neither would stoop to command, 'cause both thought it glory to obey.

Lure. Stuff! stuff! stuff! I won't believe a word on't.

Wild. Ha, ha, ha! Then, Madam, we never felt the yoke of matrimony, because our inclinations made us one—a power superior to the forms of

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wedlock. The marriage torch had lost its weaker light in the bright flame of mutual love that joined our hearts before; then—

Lure. Hold, hold, Sir; I cannot bear it, Sir Harry, I'm affronted.

Wild. Ha, ha, ha! Affronted!

Lure. Yes, Sir; 'tis an affront to any woman to hear another commended, and I will resent it. In short, Sir Harry, your wife was a—

Wild. Buz, Madam—no detraction. I'll tell you what she was. So much an angel in her conduct, that though I saw another in her arms, I should have thought the devil had raised the phantom, and my more conscious reason had given my eyes the lie.

Lure. Very well! then I a'n't to be believed, it seems. But, d'ye hear, Sir!

Wild. Nay, Madam, do you hear! I tell you 'tis not in the power of malice to cast a blot upon her fame; and though the vanity of our sex, and the envy of yours, conspired both against her honour, I would not hear a syllable. [*Stopping his ears.*]

Lure. Why then, as I hope to breathe, you shall hear it. The picture! the picture! the picture! [*Bawling aloud.*]

Wild. Ran, tan, tan. A pistol-bullet from ear to ear.

Lure. That picture which you had just now from the French Marquis for a thousand pounds; that very picture did your very virtuous wife send to the Marquis as a pledge of her very virtuous and dying affection. So that you are both robbed of your honour and cheated of your money. [*Loud.*]

Wild. Louder, louder, Madam.

Lure. I tell you, Sir, your wife was a jilt; I know it, I'll swear it. She virtuous! she was a devil!

Wild. [*Sings.*] Tal, al, deral.

Lure. Was ever the like seen! He won't hear me. I burst with malice, and now he won't mind me! Won't you hear me yet?

Wild. No, no, Madam!

Lure. Nay, then I can't bear it. [*Bursts out a crying.*] Sir, I must say that you're an unworthy person, to use a woman of quality at this rate, when she has her heart full of malice; I don't know but it may make me miscarry. Sir, I say again and again, that she was no better than one of us, and I know it; I have seen it with my eyes, so I have.

Wild. Good heav'ns deliver me, I beseech thee! How shall I 'scape?

Lure. Will you hear me yet? Dear Sir Harry, do but hear me; I'm longing to speak.

Wild. Oh! I have it.—Hush, hush, hush.

Lure. Eh! what's the matter?

Wild. A mouse! a mouse! a mouse!

Lure. Where? where? where?

Wild. Your petticoats, your petticoats, Madam. [*Lurewell shrieks and runs.*] O my head! I was never worsted by a woman before. But I have

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heard so much to know the Marquis to be a villain. [*Knocking.*] Nay, then, I must run for't. [*Runs out and returns.*] The entry is stopped by a chair coming in; and something there is in that chair that I will discover, if I can find a place to hide myself. [*Goes to the closet door.*] Fast! I have keys about me for most locks about St. James's. Let me see. [*Tries one key.*] No, no; this opens my Lady Planthorn's back-door. [*Tries another.*] Nor this; this is the key to my Lady Stakeall's garden. [*Tries a third.*] Ay, ay, this does it, faith. [*Goes into the closet.*]

The dialogue between Cherry and Archer, in 'The Beaux' Stratagem,' in which she repeats her well-conned love catechism, is as good as this, but not so fit to be repeated anywhere but on the stage. 'The Beaux' Stratagem' is the best of his plays as a whole; infinitely lively, bustling, and full of point and interest.

The assumed disguise of the two principal characters, Archer and Aimwell, is a perpetual amusement to the mind. Scrub is an indispensable appendage to a country gentleman's kitchen, and an exquisite confidant for the secrets of young ladies. 'The Recruiting Officer' is not one of Farquhar's best comedies, though it is light and entertaining. It contains chiefly sketches and hints of characters, and the conclusion of the plot is rather lame. He informs us, in the dedication to the published play, that it was founded on some local and personal circumstances that happened in Shropshire, where he was himself a recruiting officer; and it seems not unlikely that most of the scenes actually took place at the foot of the Wrekin. 'The Inconstant' is much superior to it. The romantic interest and impressive catastrophe of this play, I thought, had been borrowed from the more poetical and tragedy-practised muse of Beaumont and Fletcher; but I find they are taken from an actual circumstance which took place in the author's knowledge, at Paris. His other pieces, 'Love and a Bottle,' and 'The Twin Rivals,' are not on a par with these, and no longer in possession of the stage. The public are, after all, not the worst judges. Farquhar's 'Letters,' prefixed to the collection of his plays, are lively, good-humoured, and sensible, and contain, among other things, an admirable exposition of the futility of the dramatic unities of time and place.

This criticism preceded Dennis's remarks on that subject, in

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his strictures on Mr. Addison's 'Cato,' and completely anticipates all that Dr. Johnson has urged so unanswerably on the subject in his preface to Shakspeare.

We may date the decline of English comedy from the time of Farquhar.

For this several causes might be assigned in the political and moral changes of the times; but, among other minor ones, Jeremy Collier, in his 'View of the English Stage,' frightened the poets, and did all he could to spoil the stage by pretending to reform it; that is, by making it an echo of the pulpit, instead of a reflection of the manners of the world. He complains bitterly of the profaneness of the stage; and is for fining the actors for every oath they utter, to put an end to the practice; as if common swearing had been an invention of the poets and stage-players. He cannot endure that the fine gentlemen drink, and the fine ladies intrigue, in the scenes of Congreve and Wycherley, when things so contrary to law and gospel happened nowhere else. He is vehement against duelling, as a barbarous custom, of which the example is suffered with impunity nowhere but on the stage. He is shocked at the number of fortunes that are irreparably ruined by the vice of gaming on the boards of the theatres. He seems to think that every breach of the ten commandments begins and ends there. He complains that the tame husbands of his time are laughed at on the stage, and that the successful gallants triumph, which was without precedent either in the city or the court. He does not think it enough that the stage "shows vice its own image, scorn its own feature," unless they are damned at the same instant, and carried off (like Don Juan) by real devils to the infernal regions, before the faces of the spectators. It seems that the author would have been contented to be present at a comedy or a farce, like a Father Inquisitor, if there was to be an *auto da fé* at the end, to burn both the actors and the poet. This sour, nonjuring critic has a great horror and repugnance at poor human nature in nearly all its shapes, of the existence of which he appears only to be aware through the stage: and this he considers as the only exception to the practice of piety, and the performance of the whole duty of man; and seems fully convinced, that if this nuisance

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were abated, the whole world would be regulated according to the creed and the catechism.—This is a strange blindness and infatuation! He forgets, in his over-heated zeal, two things: First, that the stage must be copied from real life, that the manners represented there must exist elsewhere, and "denote a foregone conclusion," to satisfy common sense.—Secondly, that the stage cannot shock common decency, according to the notions that prevail of it in any age or country, because the exhibition is public. If the pulpit, for instance, had banished all vice and imperfection from the world, as our critic would suppose, we should not have seen the offensive reflection of them on the stage, which he resents as an affront to the cloth, and an outrage on religion. On the contrary, with such a sweeping reformation as this theory implies, the office of the preacher, as well as of the player, would be gone; and if the common peccadillos of lying, swearing, intriguing, fighting, drinking, gaming, and other such obnoxious dramatic common-places, were once fairly got rid of in reality, neither the comic poet would be able to laugh at them on the stage, nor our good-natured author to consign them over to damnation elsewhere. The work is, however, written with ability, and did much mischief: it produced those *do-me-good*, lack-a-daisical, whining, make-believe comedies in the next age, (such as Steele's 'Conscious Lovers,' and others,) which are enough to set one to sleep, and where the author tries in vain to be merry and wise in the same breath; in which the utmost stretch of licentiousness goes no farther than the gallant's being suspected of keeping a mistress, and the highest proof of courage is given in his refusing to accept a challenge.

In looking into the old editions of the comedies of the last age, I find the names of the best actors of those times, of whom scarcely any record is left but in Colley Cibber's Life, and the monument to Mrs. Oldfield in Westminster Abbey; which Voltaire reckons among the proofs of the liberality, wisdom, and politeness of the English nation:—

> "Let no rude hand deface it,
> And its fortern *hic jacet*."

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Authors after their deaths live in their works: players only in their epitaphs and the breath of common tradition. They "die and leave the world no copy." Their uncertain popularity is as short-lived as it is dazzling, and in a few years nothing is known of them but that *they were*.

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LECTURE V.

On the Periodical Essayists.

"The proper study of mankind is man."

I NOW come to speak of that sort of writing which has been so successfully cultivated in this country by our periodical Essayists, and which consists in applying the talents and resources of the mind to all that mixed mass of human affairs, which, though not included under the head of any regular art, science, or profession, falls under the cognizance of the writer, and "comes home to the business and bosoms of men." *Quicquid agunt homines nostri farrago libelli*, is the general motto of this department of literature. It does not treat of minerals or fossils, of the virtues of plants, or the influence of planets; it does not meddle with forms of belief, or systems of philosophy, nor launch into the world of spiritual existences; but it makes familiar with the world of men and women, records their actions, assigns their motives, exhibits their whims, characterizes their pursuits in all their singular and endless variety, ridicules their absurdities, exposes their inconsistencies, "holds the mirror up to nature, and shows the very age and body of the time, its form and pressure;" takes minutes of our dress, air, looks, words, thoughts, and actions; shows us what we are, and what we are not; plays the whole game of human life over before us, and by making us enlightened spectators of its many-coloured scenes, enables us (if possible) to become tolerably reasonable agents in the one in which we have to perform a part. "The act and practic part of life is thus made the mistress of our theorique." It is the best and most natural course of study. It is in morals and manners what the experimental is in natural philosophy, as opposed to the dogmatical method. It does not deal in sweeping clauses of proscription and anathema, but in nice distinctions and liberal

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constructions. It makes up its general accounts from details, its few theories from many facts. It does not try to prove all black or all white as it wishes, but lays on the intermediate colours (and most of them not unpleasing ones,) as it finds them blended with "the web of our life, which is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together." It inquires what human life is and has been, to show what it ought to be. It follows it into courts and camps, into town and country, into rustic sports or learned disputations, into the various shades of prejudice or ignorance, of refinement or barbarism, into its private haunts or public pageants, into its weaknesses and littlenesses, its professions and its practices—before it pretends to distinguish right from wrong, or one thing from another. How, indeed, should it do so otherwise?

> "Quid sit pulchrum, quid turpe, quid utile, quid non,
> Plenius et melius Chrysippo et Crantore dicit."

The writers I speak of are, if not moral philosophers, moral historians, and that's better; or if they are both, they found the one character upon the other; their premises precede their conclusions; and we put faith in their testimony, for we know that it is true.

Montaigne was the first person who in his Essays led the way to this kind of writing among the moderns. The great merit of Montaigne then was, that he may be said to have been the first who had the courage to say as an author what he felt as a man. And as courage is generally the effect of conscious strength, he was probably led to do so by the richness, truth, and force of his own observations on books and men. He was, in the truest sense, a man of original mind, that is, he had the power of looking at things for himself, or as they really were, instead of blindly trusting to, and fondly repeating what others told him that they were. He got rid of the go-cart of prejudice and affectation, with the learned lumber that follows at their heels, because he could do without them. In taking up his pen he did not set up for a philosopher, wit, orator, or moralist, but he became all these by merely daring to tell us whatever passed through his mind, in its naked simplicity and force, that he thought anyways worth communicating. He did not, in the

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abstract character of an author, undertake to say all that could be said upon a subject, but what in his capacity as an inquirer after truth he happened to know about it. He was neither a pedant nor a bigot. He neither supposed that he was bound to know all things, nor that all things were bound to conform to what he had fancied or would have them to be. In treating of men and manners, he spoke of them as he found them, not according to preconceived notions and abstract dogmas; and he began by teaching us what he himself was. In criticising books he did not compare them with rules and systems, but told us what he saw to like or dislike in them. He did not take his standard of excellence "according to an exact scale" of Aristotle, or fall out with a work that was good for anything, because "not one of the angles at the four corners was a right one." He was, in a word, the first author who was not a book-maker, and who wrote, not to make converts of others to established creeds and prejudices, but to satisfy his own mind of the truth of things. In this respect we know not which to be most charmed with, the author or the man. There is an inexpressible frankness and sincerity, as well as power, in what he writes. There is no attempt at imposition or concealment, no juggling tricks or solemn mouthings, no laboured attempts at proving himself always in the right, and everybody else in the wrong; he says what is uppermost, lays open what floats at the top or the bottom of his mind, and deserves Pope's character of him, where he professes to

> "——— pour out all as plain
> As downright Shippen, or as old Montaigne."*

He does not converse with us like a pedagogue with his pupil, whom he wishes to make as great a blockhead as himself, but like a philosopher and friend who has passed through life with thought and observation, and is willing to enable others to pass through it with pleasure and profit. A writer of this stamp, I confess, appears to me as much superior to a common bookworm as a library of real books is superior to a mere book-case,

* Why Pope should say in reference to him, "Or *more wise* Charron," is not easy to determine.

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painted and lettered on the outside with the names of celebrated works. As he was the first to attempt this new way of writing, so the same strong natural impulse which prompted the undertaking, carried him to the end of his career. The same force and honesty of mind which urged him to throw off the shackles of custom and prejudice, would enable him to complete his triumph over them. He has left little for his successors to achieve in the way of just and original speculation on human life. Nearly all the thinking of the two last centuries of that kind which the French denominate *morale observatrice*, is to be found in Montaigne's Essays: there is a germ, at least, and generally much more. He sowed the seed and cleared away the rubbish, even where others have reaped the fruit, or cultivated and decorated the soil to a greater degree of nicety and perfection. There is no one to whom the old Latin adage is more applicable than to Montaigne, "*Pereant isti qui ante nos nostra dixerunt.*" There has been no new impulse given to thought since his time. Among the specimens of criticisms on authors which he has left us, are those on Virgil, Ovid, and Boccaccio, in the account of books which he thinks worth reading, or (which is the same thing) which he finds he can read in his old age, and which may be reckoned among the few criticisms which are worth reading at any age.*

* As an instance of his general power of reasoning, I shall give his chapter entitled *One Man's Profit is another's Loss*, in which he has nearly anticipated Mandeville's celebrated paradox of private vices being public benefits:—

"Demades, the Athenian, condemned a fellow-citizen, who furnished out funerals, for demanding too great a price for his goods; and if he got an estate, it must be by the death of a great many people; but I think it a sentence ill grounded, forasmuch as no profit can be made but at the expense of some other person, and that every kind of gain is by that rule liable to be condemned. The tradesman thrives by the debauchery of youth, and the farmer by the dearness of corn; the architect by the ruin of buildings, the officers of justice by quarrels and lawsuits; nay, even the honour and function of divines is owing to our mortality and vices. No physician takes pleasure in the health even of his best friends, said the ancient Greek comedian, nor soldier in the peace of his country; and so of the rest. And, what is yet worse, let every one but examine his own heart, and he will find that his private wishes spring and grow up at the ex-

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Montaigne's Essays were translated into English by Charles Cotton, who was one of the wits and poets of the age of Charles II.; and Lord Halifax, one of the noble critics of that day, declared it to be "the book in the world he was the best pleased with." This mode of familiar Essay writing, free from the trammels of the schools and the airs of professed authorship, was successfully imitated, about the same time, by Cowley and Sir William Temple in their miscellaneous Essays, which are very agreeable and learned talking upon paper. Lord Shaftesbury, on the contrary, who aimed at the same easy, *degage* mode of communicating his thoughts to the world, has quite spoiled his matter, which is sometimes valuable, by his manner, in which he carries a certain flaunting, flowery, figurative, flirting style of amicable condescension to the reader, to an excess more tantalising than the most starched and ridiculous formality of the age of James I. There is nothing so tormenting as the affectation of ease and freedom from affectation.

The ice being thus thawed, and the barrier that kept authors at a distance from common sense and feeling broken through, the transition was not difficult from Montaigne and his imitators to our Periodical Essayists. These last applied the same unrestrained expression of their thoughts to the more immediate and passing scenes of life, to temporary and local matters; and in order to discharge the invidious office of *Censor Morum* more freely, and with less responsibility, assumed some fictitious and humorous disguise, which, however, in a degree, corresponded to their own peculiar habits and character. By thus concealing their own name and person under the title of the 'Tatler,'

pense of some other person. Upon which consideration this thought came into my head, that nature does not deviate from her general policy; for that naturalists hold that the birth, nourishment, and increase of any one thing is the decay and corruption of another:—

Nam quodcunque suis mutatum finibus exit,
Continuo hoc mors est illius, quod fuit ante.

"For what from its own confines chang'd doth pass,
Is straight the death of what before it was."

Vol. I. *Chap.* xxi.

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'Spectator,' &c., they were enabled to inform us more fully of what was passing in the world, while the dramatic contrast and ironical point of view to which the whole is subjected, added a greater liveliness and piquancy to the descriptions. The philosopher and wit here commences newsmonger, makes himself master of "the perfect spy o' th' time," and from his various walks and turns through life, brings home little curious specimens of the humours, opinions, and manners of his contemporaries, as the botanist brings home different plants and weeds, or the mineralogist different shells and fossils, to illustrate their several theories, and be useful to mankind.

The first of these papers that was attempted in this country was set up by Steele in the beginning of the last century; and of all our periodical Essayists, the 'Tatler' (for that was the name he assumed) has always appeared to me the most accomplished and agreeable. Montaigne, whom I have proposed to consider as the father of this kind of personal authorship among the moderns, in which the reader is admitted behind the curtain, and sits down with the writer in his gown and slippers, was a most magnanimous and undisguised egotist; but Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq., was the more disinterested gossip of the two. The French author is contented to describe the peculiarities of his own mind and person, which he does with a most copious and unsparing hand. The English journalist good-naturedly lets you into the secret both of his own affairs and those of his neighbours. A young lady, on the other side of Temple Bar, cannot be seen at her glass for half a day together, but Mr. Bickerstaff takes due notice of it; and he has the first intelligence of the symptoms of the *belle passion* appearing in any young gentleman at the west end of the town. The departures and arrivals of widows with handsome jointures, either to bury their grief in the country, or to procure a second husband in town, are regularly recorded in his pages. He is well acquainted with the celebrated beauties of the preceding age at the court of Charles II.; and the old gentleman (as he feigns himself) often grows romantic in recounting "the disastrous strokes which his youth suffered" from the glances of their bright eyes, and their unaccountable caprices. In particular he dwells with a

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secret satisfaction on the recollection of one of his mistresses, who left him for a richer rival, and whose constant reproach to her husband, on occasion of any quarrel between them, was "I, that might have married the famous Mr. Bickerstaff, to be treated in this manner!" The club at the Trumpet consists of a set of persons almost as well worth knowing as himself. The cavalcade of the justice of the peace, the knight of the shire, the country squire, and the young gentleman, his nephew, who came to wait on him at his chambers, in such form and ceremony, seem not to have settled the order of their precedence to this hour; and I should hope that the upholsterer and his companions, who used to sun themselves in the Green Park, and who broke their rest and fortunes to maintain the balance of power in Europe, stand as fair a chance for immortality as some modern politicians. Mr. Bickerstaff himself is a gentleman and a scholar, a humorist and a man of the world, with a great deal of nice easy *naïveté* about him. If he walks out and is caught in a shower of rain, he makes amends for this unlucky accident by a criticism on the shower in Virgil, and concludes with a burlesque copy of verses on a city shower. He entertains us, when he dates from his own apartment, with a quotation from Plutarch, or a moral reflection; from the Grecian coffee-house with politics, and from Will's, or the Temple, with the poets and players, the beaux and men of wit and pleasure about town. In reading the pages of the 'Tatler,' we seem as if suddenly carried back to the age of Queen Anne, of toupees and full-bottomed periwigs. The whole appearance of our dress and manners undergoes a delightful metamorphosis. We are surprised with the rustling of hoops, and the glittering of paste buckles. The beaux and the belles are of a quite different species from what they are at present; we distinguish the dappers, the sm. rts, and the pretty fellows, as they pass by Mr. Lilly's shop-win ws in the Strand; we are introduced to Betterton and Mrs. Oldfield behind the scenes; are made familiar with the persons and performances of Mr. Penkethman and Mr. Bullock; we listen to a dispute at a tavern on the merits of the Duke of Marlborough, or Marshal Turenne; or are present at the first rehearsal of a play by Vanbrugh, or the reading of a new poem by Mr. Pope.

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The privilege of thus virtually transporting ourselves to past times, is even greater than that of visiting distant places in reality. London a hundred years ago would be much better worth seeing than Paris at the present moment.

It may be said, that all this is to be found, in the same or a greater degree, in the 'Spectator.' For myself, I do not think so; or, at least, there is in the last work a much greater proportion of common-place matter. I have on this account, always preferred the 'Tatler' to the 'Spectator.' Whether it is owing to my having been earlier or better acquainted with the one than the other, my pleasure in reading these two admirable works is not at all in proportion to their comparative reputation. The 'Tatler' contains only half the number of volumes, and, I will venture to say, at least an equal quantity of sterling wit and sense. "The first sprightly runnings" are there—it has more of the original spirit, more of the freshness and stamp of nature. The indications of character and strokes of humour are more true and frequent; the reflections that suggest themselves arise more from the occasion, and are less spun out into regular dissertations. They are more like the remarks which occur in sensible conversation, and less like a lecture. Something is left to the understanding of the reader. Steele seems to have gone into his closet chiefly to set down what he observed out of doors. Addison seems to have spent most of his time in his study, and to have spun out and wire-drawn the hints, which he borrowed from Steele, or took from nature, to the utmost. I am far from wishing to depreciate Addison's talents, but I am anxious to do justice to Steele, who was, I think, upon the whole, a less artificial and more original writer. The humorous descriptions of Steele resemble loose sketches, or fragments of a comedy; those of Addison are rather comments, or ingenious paraphrases, on the genuine text. The characters of the club not only in the 'Tatler,' but in the 'Spectator,' were drawn by Steele. That of Sir Roger de Coverley is among the number. Addison has, however, gained himself immortal honour by his manner of filling up this last character. Who is there that can forget, or be insensible to, the inimitable, nameless graces, and varied traits of nature and of old English character, in it—to his unpretending

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virtues and amiable weaknesses—to his modesty, generosity, hospitality, and eccentric whims—to the respect of his neighbours, and the affection of his domestics—to his wayward, hopeless, secret passion for his fair enemy, the widow, in which there is more of real romance and true delicacy than in a thousand tales of knight-errantry—(we perceive the hectic flush of his cheek, the faltering of his tongue in speaking of her bewitching airs and "the whiteness of her hand")—to the havoc he makes among the game in his neighbourhood—to his speech from the bench, to show the 'Spectator' what is thought of him in the country—to his unwillingness to be put up as a sign-post, and his having his own likeness turned into the Saracen's head—to his gentle reproof of the baggage of a gipsy that tells him "he has a widow in his line of life"—to his doubts as to the existence of witchcraft, and protection of reputed witches—to his account of the family pictures, and his choice of a chaplain—to his falling asleep at church, and his reproof of John Williams, as soon as he recovered from his nap, for talking in sermon-time. The characters of Will Wimble and Will Honeycomb are not a whit behind their friend, Sir Roger, in delicacy and felicity. The delightful simplicity and good-humoured officiousness in the one are set off by the graceful affectation and courtly pretension in the other. How long since I first became acquainted with these two characters in the 'Spectator!' What old-fashioned friends they seem, and yet I am not tired of them, like so many other friends, nor they of me! How airy these abstractions of the poet's pen stream over the dawn of our acquaintance with human life! how they glance their fairest colours on the prospect before us! how pure they remain in it to the last, like the rainbow in the evening cloud, which the rude hand of time can neither soil nor dissipate! What a pity that we cannot find the reality, and yet if we did, the dream would be over. I once thought I knew a Will Wimble, and a Will Honeycomb, but they turned out but indifferently: the originals in the 'Spectator' still read word for word, the same that they always did. We have only to turn to the page, and find them where we left them!—Many of the most exquisite pieces in the 'Tatler,' it is to be observed, are Addison's, as the 'Court of Honour,' and the 'Personification of

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Musical Instruments,' with almost all those papers that form regular sets or series. I do not know whether the picture of the family of an old college acquaintance, in the 'Tatler,' where the children run to let Mr. Bickerstaff in at the door, and where the one that loses the race that way, turns back to tell the father that he is come; with the nice gradation of incredulity in the little boy, who is got into 'Guy of Warwick,' and the 'Seven Champions,' and who shakes his head at the improbability of 'Æsop's Fables,' is Steele's or Addison's, though I believe it belongs to the former.* The account of the two sisters, one of whom held up her head higher than ordinary, from having on a pair of flowered garters, and that of the married lady who complained to the 'Tatler' of the neglect of her husband, with her answers to some *home* questions that were put to her, are unquestionably Steele's. If the 'Tatler' is not inferior to the 'Spectator' as a record of manners and character, it is very superior to it in the interest of many of the stories. Several of the incidents related there by Steele have never been surpassed in the heart-rending pathos of private distress. I might refer to those of the lover and his mistress, when the theatre, in which they were, caught fire; of the bridegroom, who by accident kills his bride on the day of their marriage; the story of Mr. Eustace and his wife; and the fine dream about his own mistress when a youth. What has given its superior reputation to the 'Spectator,' is the greater gravity of its pretensions, its moral dissertations and critical reasonings, by which I confess myself less edified than by other things, which are thought more lightly of. Systems and opinions change, but nature is always true. It is the extremely moral and didactic tone of the 'Spectator' which makes us apt to think of Addison (according to Mande-

* It is Steele's; and the whole paper (No. 95,) observes Mr. Leigh Hunt, is in his most delightful manner. The dream about the mistress, however, is given to Addison by the editors, and the general style of that number is his; though, from the story's being related personally of Bickerstaff, who is also represented as having been at that time in the army, we conclude it to have originally come from Steele, perhaps in the course of conversation. The particular incident is much more like a story of his than of Addison's.

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ville's sarcasm) as "a parson in a tie-wig." Many of his moral Essays are, however, exquisitely beautiful and happy. Such are the reflections on cheerfulness, those in Westminster Abbey, on the Royal Exchange, and particularly some very affecting ones on the death of a young lady in the fourth volume. These, it must be allowed, are the perfection of elegant sermonising. His critical Essays are not so good. I prefer Steele's occasional selection of beautiful poetical passages, without any affectation of analysing their beauties, to Addison's fine-spun theories. The best criticism in the 'Spectator,' that on the Cartoons of Raphael, of which Mr. Fuseli has availed himself with great spirit in his Lectures, is by Steele.* I owed this acknowledgment to a writer who has so often put me in good humour with myself, and everything about me, when few things else could, and when the tomes of casuistry and ecclesiastical history, with which the little duodecimo volumes of the 'Tatler' were overwhelmed and surrounded, in the only library to which I had access when a boy, had tried their tranquillising effects upon me in vain. I had not long ago in my hands, by favour of a friend, an original copy of the quarto edition of the 'Tatler,' with a list of the subscribers. It is curious to see some names there which we should hardly think of (that of Sir Isaac Newton is among them,) and also to observe the degree of interest excited by those of the different persons, which is not determined according to the rules of the Herald's College. One literary name lasts as long as a whole race of heroes and their descendants! The 'Guardian,' which followed the 'Spectator,' was, as may be supposed, inferior to it.

The dramatic and conversational turn which forms the distinguishing feature and greatest charm of the 'Spectator' and 'Tatler,' is quite lost in the 'Rambler,' by Dr. Johnson. There is no reflected light thrown on human life from an assumed character, nor any direct one from a display of the author's own. The 'Tatler' and 'Spectator' are, as it were, made up of notes

* The antithetical style and verbal parodoxes which Burke was so fond of, in which the epithet is a seeming contradiction to the substantive, such as "proud submission" and "dignified obedience," are, I think, first to be found in the 'Tatler.'

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and memorandums of the events and incidents of the day, with finished studies after nature, and characters fresh from the life, which the writer moralises upon, and turns to account as they come before him. The 'Rambler' is a collection of moral Essays, or scholastic theses, written on set subjects, and of which the individual characters and incidents are merely artificial illustrations, brought in to give a pretended relief to the dryness of didactic discussion. The 'Rambler' is a splendid and imposing common-place-book of general topics, and rhetorical declamation on the conduct and business of human life. In this sense, there is hardly a reflection that had been suggested on such subjects which is not to be found in this celebrated work, and there is, perhaps, hardly a reflection to be found in it which had not been already suggested and developed by some other author, or in the common course of conversation. The mass of intellectual wealth here heaped together is immense, but it is rather the result of gradual accumulation, the produce of the general intellect, labouring in the mine of knowledge and reflection, than dug out of the quarry, and dragged into the light by the industry and sagacity of a single mind. I am not here saying that Dr. Johnson was a man without originality, compared with the ordinary run of men's minds, but he was not a man of original thought or genius, in the sense in which Montaigne or Lord Bacon was. He opened no new vein of precious ore, nor did he light upon any single pebbles of uncommon size and unrivalled lustre. We seldom meet with anything to "give us pause;" he does not set us thinking for the first time. His reflections present themselves like reminiscences; do not disturb the ordinary march of our thoughts; arrest our attention by the stateliness of their appearance, and the costliness of their garb, but pass on and mingle with the throng of our impressions. After closing the volumes of the 'Rambler,' there is nothing that we remember as a new truth gained to the mind, nothing indelibly stamped upon the memory; nor is there any passage that we wish to turn to as embodying any known principle or observation, with such force and beauty that justice can only be done to the idea in the author's own words. Such, for instance, are many of the passages to be found in Burke, which

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shine by their own light, belong to no class, have neither equal nor counterpart, and of which we say that no one but the author could have written them! There is neither the same boldness of design nor mastery of execution in Johnson. In the one, the spark of genius seems to have met with its congenial matter; the shaft is sped: the forked lightning dresses up the face of nature in ghastly smiles, and the loud thunder rolls far away from the ruin that is made. Dr. Johnson's style, on the contrary, resembles rather the rumbling of mimic thunder at one of our theatres; and the light he throws upon a subject is like the dazzling effect of phosphorus, or an *ignis fatuus* of words. There is a wide difference, however, between perfect originality and perfect common-place: neither ideas nor expressions are trite or vulgar because they are not quite new. They are valuable, and ought to be repeated, if they have not become quite common; and Johnson's style both of reasoning and imagery holds the middle rank between startling novelty and vapid common-place. Johnson has as much originality of thinking as Addison; but then he wants his familiarity of illustration, knowledge of character, and delightful humour.—What most distinguishes Dr. Johnson from other writers, is the pomp and uniformity of his style. All his periods are cast in the same mould, are of the same size and shape, and consequently have little fitness to the variety of things he professes to treat of. His subjects are familiar, but the author is always upon stilts. He has neither ease nor simplicity, and his efforts at playfulness, in part, remind one of the lines in Milton:—

"———— The elephant
To make them sport wreath'd his proboscis lithe."

His 'Letters from Correspondents,' in particular, are more pompous and unwieldly than what he writes in his own person. This want of relaxation and variety of manner has, I think, after the first effects of novelty and surprise were over, been prejudicial to the matter. It takes from the general power, not only to please, but to instruct. The monotony of style produces an apparent monotony of ideas. What is really striking and valuable, is lost in the vain ostentation and circumlocution

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of the expression; for when we find the same pains and pomp of diction bestowed upon the most trifling as upon the most important parts of a sentence or discourse, we grow tired of distinguishing between pretension and reality, and are disposed to confound the tinsel and bombast of the phraseology with want of weight in the thoughts. Thus, from the imposing and oracular nature of the style, people are tempted at first to imagine that our author's speculations are all wisdom and profundity: till having found out their mistake in some instances, they suppose that there is nothing but common-place in them, concealed under verbiage and pedantry; and in both they are wrong. The fault of Dr. Johnson's style is, that it reduces all things to the same artificial and unmeaning level. It destroys all shades of difference, the association between words and things. It is a perpetual paradox and innovation. He condescends to the familiar till we are ashamed of our interest in it: he expands the little till it looks big. "If he were to write a fable of little fishes," as Goldsmith said of him, "he would make them speak like great whales." We can no more distinguish the most familiar objects in his descriptions of them, than we can a well-known face under a huge painted mask. The structure of his sentences, which was his own invention, and which has been generally imitated since his time, is a species of rhyming in prose, where one clause answers to another in measure and quantity, like the tagging of syllables at the end of a verse; the close of the period follows as mechanically as the oscillation of a pendulum, the sense is balanced with the sound; each sentence, revolving round its centre of gravity, is contained within itself like a couplet, and each paragraph forms itself into a stanza. Dr. Johnson is also a complete balance-master in the topics of morality. He never encourages hope, but he counteracts it by fear; he never elicits a truth, but he suggests some objection in answer to it. He seizes and alternately quits the clue of reason, lest it should involve him in the labyrinths of endless error: he wants confidence in himself and his fellows. He dares not trust himself with the immediate impressions of things, for fear of compromising his dignity; or follow them into their consequences, for fear of committing his prejudices.

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His timidity is the result, not of ignorance, but of morbid apprehension. "He turns the great circle, and is still at home." No advance is made by his writings in any sentiment, or mode of reasoning. Out of the pale of established authority and received dogmas, all is sceptical, loose, and desultory: he seems in imagination to strengthen the dominion of prejudice, as he weakens and dissipates that of reason; and round the rock of faith and power, on the edge of which he slumbers blindfold and uneasy, the waves and billows of uncertain and dangerous opinion roar and heave for evermore. His 'Rasselas' is the most melancholy and debilitating moral speculation that ever was put forth. Doubtful of the faculties of his mind, as of his organs of vision, Johnson trusted only to his feelings and his fears. He cultivated a belief in witches as an out-guard to the evidences of religion; and abused Milton, and patronised Lauder, in spite of his aversion to his countrymen, as a step to secure the existing establishment in church and state. This was neither right feeling nor sound logic.

The most triumphant record of the talents and character of Johnson is to be found in Boswell's life of him. The man was superior to the author. When he threw aside his pen, which he regarded as an encumbrance, he became not only learned and thoughtful, but acute, witty, humorous, natural, honest; hearty and determined, "the king of good fellows and wale of old men." There are as many smart repartees, profound remarks, and keen invectives to be found in Boswell's "inventory of all he said," as are recorded of any celebrated man. The life and dramatic play of his conversation forms a contrast to his written works. His natural powers and undisguised opinions were called out in convivial intercourse. In public, he practised with the foils: in private, he unsheathed the sword of controversy, and it was "the Ebro's temper." The eagerness of opposition roused him from his natural sluggishness and acquired timidity; he returned blow for blow; and whether the trial were of argument or wit, none of his rivals could boast much of the encounter. Burke seems to have been the only person who had a chance with him; and it is the unpardonable sin of Boswell's work, that he has purpose-

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ly omitted their combats of strength and skill. Goldsmith asked, "does he wind into a subject like a serpent, as Burke does?" And when exhausted with sickness, he himself said, "If that fellow Burke were here now, he would kill me." It is to be observed, that Johnson's colloquial style was as blunt, direct, and downright, as his style of studied composition was involved and circuitous. As when Topham, Beauclerc, and Langton knocked him up at his chambers at three in the morning, and he came to the door with the poker in his hand, but seeing them, exclaimed, "What! is it you, my lads? then I'll have a frisk with you!" and he afterwards reproaches Langton, who was a literary milksop, for leaving them to go to an engagement "with some *un-idead* girls." What words to come from the mouth of the great moralist and lexicographer! His good deeds were as many as his good sayings. His domestic habits, his tenderness to servants, and readiness to oblige his friends; the quantity of strong tea that he drank to keep down sad thoughts; his many labours reluctantly begun, and irresolutely laid aside; his honest acknowledgment of his own, and indulgence to the weaknesses of others; his throwing himself back in the post-chaise with Boswell, and saying, "Now I think I am a good-humoured fellow," though nobody thought him so, and yet he was; his quitting the society of Garrick and his actresses, and his reason for it; his dining with Wilkes, and his kindness to Goldsmith; his sitting with the young ladies on his knee at the Mitre, to give them good advice, in which situation, if not explained, he might be taken for Falstaff; and last and noblest, his carrying the unfortunate victim of disease and dissipation on his back up through Fleet street (an act which realises the parable of the good Samaritan)—all these, and innumerable others, endear him to the reader, and must be remembered to his lasting honour. He had faults, but they lie buried with him. He had his prejudices and his intolerant feelings, but he suffered enough in the conflict of his own mind with them; for if no man can be happy in the free exercise of his reason, no wise man can be happy without it. His were not time-serving, heartless, hypocritical prejudices; but deep, inwoven, not to be rooted out but with life and hope, which he found from old

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habit necessary to his own peace of mind, and thought so to the peace of mankind. I do not hate, but love him for them. They were between himself and his conscience, and should be left to that higher tribunal

> "Where they in trembling hope repose,
> The bosom of his father and his God."

In a word, he has left behind him few wiser or better men.

The herd of his imitators showed what he was by their disproportionate effects. The Periodical Essayists that succeeded the 'Rambler' are, and deserve to be, little read at present. 'The Adventurer,' by Hawksworth, is completely trite and vapid, aping all the faults of Johnson's style, without anything to atone for them. The sentences are often absolutely unmeaning; and one-half of each might regularly be left blank. 'The World,' and 'Connoisseur,' which followed, are a little better; and in the last of these there is one good idea, that of a man in indifferent health who judges of every one's title to respect from their possession of this blessing, and bows to a sturdy beggar with sound limbs and a florid complexion, while he turns his back upon a lord who is a valetudinarian.

Goldsmith's 'Citizen of the World,' like all his works, bears the stamp of the author's mind. It does not "go about to cozen reputation without the stamp of merit." He is more observing, more original, more natural and picturesque than Johnson. His work is written on the model of the 'Persian Letters,' and contrives to give an abstracted and somewhat perplexing view of things, by opposing foreign prepossessions to our own, and thus stripping objects of their customary disguises. Whether truth is elicited in this collision of contrary absurdities, I do not know; but I confess the process is too ambiguous and full of intricacy to be very amusing to my plain understanding. For light summer reading it is like walking in a garden full of traps and pitfalls. It necessarily gives rise to paradoxes, and there are some very bold ones in the 'Essays,' which would subject an author less established to no very agreeable sort of *censura literaria*. Thus the Chinese philosopher exclaims very unadvisedly, "The bonzes and priests of all religions keep up superstition and im-

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posture; all reformations begin with the laity." Goldsmith, however, was staunch in his practical creed, and might bolt speculative extravagances with impunity. There is a striking difference in this respect between him and Addison, who, if he attacked authority, took care to have common sense on his side, and never hazarded any thing offensive to the feelings of others, or on the strength of his own discretional opinion. There is another inconvenience in this assumption of an exotic character and tone of sentiment, that it produces an inconsistency between the knowledge which the individual has time to acquire and which the author is bound to communicate. Thus the Chinese has not been in England three days before he is acquainted with the characters of the three countries which compose this kingdom, and describes them to his friend at Canton by extracts from the newspapers of each metropolis. The nationality of Scotchmen is thus ridiculed:—

Edinburgh.—**We are positive when we say that Sanders Macregor, lately executed for horse-stealing, is not a native of Scotland, but born at Carrickfergus.**

Now this is very good; but how should our Chinese philosopher find it out by instinct? Beau Tibbs, a prominent character in this little work, is the best comic sketch since the time of Addison; unrivalled in his finery, his vanity, and his poverty.

I have only to mention the names of the 'Lounger' and the 'Mirror,' which are ranked by the author's admirers with Sterne for sentiment, and with Addison for humour. I shall not enter into that; but I know that the story of 'La Roche' is not like the story of 'Le Fevre,' nor one hundredth part so good. Do I say this from prejudice to the author? No; for I have read his novels. Of 'The Man of the World' I cannot think so favourably as some others; nor shall I here dwell on the picturesque and romantic beauties of 'Julia de Roubigne,' the early favourite of the author of 'Rosamond Gray;' but of the 'Man of Feeling' I would speak with grateful recollections; nor is it possible to forget the sensitive, irresolute, interesting Harley; and that lone figure of Miss Walton in it, that floats in the horizon, dim and ethereal, the day-dream of her lover's youthful fancy—better, far better, than all the realities of life!

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LECTURE VI.

On the English Novelists.

THERE is an exclamation in one of Gray's letters—"Be mine to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon!" If I did not utter a similar aspiration at the conclusion of the last new novel which I read (I would not give offence by being more particular as to the name) it was not from any want of affection for the class of writing to which it belongs; for without going so far as the celebrated French philosopher, who thought that more was to be learnt from good novels and romances than from the gravest treatises on history and morality, yet there are few works to which I am oftener tempted to turn for profit or delight, than to the standard productions in this species of composition. We find there a close imitation of men and manners; we see the very web and texture of society as it really exists, and as we meet with it when we come into the world. If poetry has "something more divine in it," this savours more of humanity. We are brought acquainted with the motives and characters of mankind, imbibe our notions of virtue and vice from practical examples, and are taught a knowledge of the world through the airy medium of romance. As a record of past manners and opinions, too, such writings afford the best and fullest information. For example, I should be at a loss where to find in any authentic documents of the same period so satisfactory an account of the general state of society, and of moral, political, and religious feeling in the reign of George II. as we meet with in the Adventures of Joseph Andrews and his friend Mr. Abraham Adams. This work, indeed, I take to be a perfect piece of statistics in its kind. In looking into any regular history of that period, into a learned and eloquent charge to a grand jury or the clergy of a diocese or into a tract on controversial divinity we should hear

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only of the ascendancy of the Protestant succession, the horrors of Popery, the triumph of civil and religious liberty, the wisdom and moderation of the sovereign, the happiness of the subject, and the flourishing state of manufactures and commerce. But if we really wish to know what all these fine-sounding names come to, we cannot do better than turn to the works of those who, having no other object than to imitate nature, could only hope for success from the fidelity of their pictures; and were bound (in self-defence) to reduce the boasts of vague theorists and the exaggerations of angry disputants to the mortifying standard of reality. Extremes are said to meet; and the works of imagination, as they are called, sometimes come the nearest to truth and nature. Fielding, in speaking on this subject, and vindicating the use and dignity of the style of writing in which he excelled against the loftier pretensions of professed historians, says, "that in their productions nothing is true but the names and dates, whereas in his everything is true but the names and dates." If so, he has the advantage on his side.

I will here confess, however, that I am a little prejudiced on the point in question; and that the effect of many fine speculations has been lost upon me, from an early familiarity with the most striking passages in the work to which I have just alluded. Thus nothing can be more captivating than the description somewhere given by Mr. Burke of the indissoluble connexion between learning and nobility, and of the respect universally paid by wealth to piety and morals. But the effect of this ideal representation has always been spoiled by my recollection of Parson Adams sitting over his cup of ale in Sir Thomas Booby's kitchen. Echard 'On the Contempt of the Clergy' is, in like manner, a very good book, and "worthy of all acceptation;" but somehow an unlucky impression of the reality of Parson Trulliber involuntarily checks the emotions of respect to which it might otherwise give rise; while, on the other hand, the lecture which Lady Booby reads to Lawyer Scout on the immediate expulsion of Joseph and Fanny from the parish, casts no very favourable light on the flattering accounts of our practical jurisprudence which are to be found in Blackstone or De Lolme. The most moral writers, after all, are those who do not pretend

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to inculcate any moral. The professed moralist almost unavoidably degenerates into the partisan of a system; and the philosopher is too apt to warp the evidence to his own purpose. But the painter of manners gives the facts of human nature, and leaves us to draw the inference; if we are not able to do this, or do it ill, at least it is our own fault.

The first-rate writers in this class, of course, are few; but those few we may reckon among the greatest ornaments and best benefactors of our kind. There is a certain set of them who, as it were, take their rank by the side of reality, and are appealed to as evidence on all questions concerning human nature. The principal of these are Cervantes and Le Sage, who may be considered as having been naturalised among ourselves; and, of native English growth, Fielding, Smollett, Richardson, and Sterne.* As this is a department of criticism which deserves more attention than has been usually bestowed upon it, I shall here venture to recur (not from choice but necessity) to what I have said upon it in a well-known periodical publication;† and endeavour to contribute my mite towards settling the standard of excellence, both as to degree and kind, in these several writers.

I shall begin with the history of the renowned 'Don Quixote de la Mancha,' who presents something more stately, more romantic, and at the same time more real to the imagination, than any other hero upon record. His lineaments, his accoutrements, his pasteboard vizor, are familiar to us; and Mambrino's helmet still glitters in the sun! We not only feel the greatest love and veneration for the knight himself, but a certain respect for all those connected with him, the curate and Master Nicolas the barber, Sancho and Dapple, and even for Rosinante's leanness and his errors.—Perhaps there is no work which combines so much whimsical invention with such an air of truth. Its popularity is almost unequalled; and yet its merits have not been

* It is not to be forgotten that the author of 'Robinson Crusoe' was also an Englishman. His other works, such as the 'Life of Colonel Jack,' &c., are of the same cast, and leave an impression on the mind more like that of things than words.

† The 'Edinburgh Review.'

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sufficiently understood. The story is the least part of them; though the blunders of Sancho, and the unlucky adventures of his master, are what naturally catch the attention of the majority of readers. The pathos and dignity of the sentiments are often disguised under the ludicrousness of the subject, and provoke laughter when they might well draw tears. The character of Don Quixote himself is one of the most perfect disinterestedness. He is an enthusiast of the most amiable kind; of a nature equally open, gentle, and generous; a lover of truth and justice; and one who had brooded over the fine dreams of chivalry and romance, till they had robbed him of himself, and cheated his brain into a belief of their reality. There cannot be a greater mistake than to consider 'Don Quixote' as a merely satirical work, or as a vulgar attempt to explode "the long-forgotten order of chivalry." There could be no need to explode what no longer existed. Besides, Cervantes himself was a man of the most sanguine and enthusiastic temperament; and even through the crazed and battered figure of the knight, the spirit of chivalry shines out with undiminished lustre; as if the author had half-designed to revive the examples of past ages, and once more "witch the world with noble horsemanship." Oh! if ever the mouldering flame of Spanish liberty is destined to break forth, wrapping the tyrant and the tyranny in one consuming blaze, that the spark of generous sentiment and romantic enterprise, from which it must be kindled, has not been quite extinguished, will perhaps be owing to thee, Cervantes, and to thy 'Don Quixote!'

The character of Sancho is not more admirable in itself, than as a relief to that of the knight. The contrast is as picturesque and striking as that between the figures of Rosinante and Dapple. Never was there so complete a *partie quarreé*:—they answer to one another at all points. Nothing need surpass the truth of physiognomy in the description of the master and man, both as to body and mind; the one lean and tall, the other round and short; the one heroical and courteous, the other selfish and servile; the one full of high-flown fancies, the other a bag of proverbs; the one always starting some romantic scheme, the other trying to keep to the safe side of custom and tradition.

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The gradual ascendancy, however, obtained by Don Quixote over Sancho, is as finely managed as it is characteristic. Credulity and a love of the marvellous are as natural to ignorance as selfishness and cunning. Sancho by degrees becomes a kind of lay-brother of the order; acquires a taste for adventures in his own way, and is made all but an entire convert by the discovery of the hundred crowns in one of his most comfortless journeys. Towards the end, his regret at being forced to give up the pursuit of knight-errantry, almost equals his master's; and he seizes the proposal of Don Quixote for them to turn shepherds with the greatest avidity—still applying it in his own fashion; for while the Don is ingeniously torturing the names of his humble acquaintance into classical terminations, and contriving scenes of gallantry and song, Sancho exclaims, 'Oh, what delicate wooden spoons shall I carve! what crumbs and cream shall I devour!"—forgetting, in his milk and fruits, the pullets and geese at Camacho's wedding.

This intuitive perception of the hidden analogies of things, or, as it may be called, this *instinct of the imagination*, is, perhaps, what stamps the character of genius on the productions of art more than any other circumstance: for it works unconsciously, like nature, and receives its impressions from a kind of inspiration. There is as much of this indistinct keeping and involuntary unity of purpose in Cervantes as in any author whatever. Something of the same unsettled, rambling humour extends itself to all the subordinate parts and characters of the work. Thus we find the curate confidentially informing Don Quixote, that if he could get the ear of the government he has something of considerable importance to propose for the good of the state; and our adventurer afterwards (in the course of his peregrinations) meets with a young gentleman who is a candidate for poetical honours, with a mad lover, a forsaken damsel, a Mahometan lady converted to the Christian faith, &c.—all delineated with the same truth, wildness, and delicacy of fancy. The whole work breathes that air of romance, that aspiration after imaginary good, that indescribable longing after something more than we possess, that in all places and in all conditions of life,

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"——— still prompts the eternal sigh,
For which we wish to live, or dare to die!"

The leading characters in 'Don Quixote' are strictly individuals; that is, they do not so much belong to, as form a class by themselves. In other words, the actions and manners of the chief *dramatis personæ* do not arise out of the actions and manners of those around them, or the situation of life in which they are placed, but out of the peculiar dispositions of the persons themselves, operated upon by certain impulses of caprice and accident. Yet these impulses are so true to nature, and their operation so exactly described, that we not only recognise the fidelity of the representation, but recognise it with all the advantages of novelty superadded. They are in the best sense *originals*, namely, in the sense in which nature has her originals. They are unlike anything we have seen before—may be said to be purely ideal; and yet identify themselves more readily with our imagination, and are retained more strongly in memory, than perhaps any others: they are never lost in the crowd. One test of the truth of this ideal painting is the number of allusions which 'Don Quixote' has furnished to the whole of civilised Europe; that is to say, of appropriate cases and striking illustrations of the universal principles of our nature. The detached incidents and occasional descriptions of human life are more familiar and obvious; so that we have nearly the same insight here given us into the characters of innkeepers, bar-maids, ostlers, and puppet-show men, that we have in Fielding. There is a much greater mixture, however, of the pathetic and sentimental with the quaint and humorous, than there ever is in Fielding. I might instance the story of the countryman whom Don Quixote and Sancho met in their doubtful search after Dulcinea, driving his mules to plough at break of day, and "singing the ancient ballad of Roncesvalles!" The episodes, which are frequently introduced, are excellent, but have, upon the whole, been overrated. They derive their interest from their connexion with the main story. We are so pleased with that, that we are disposed to receive pleasure from everything else. Compared, for instance, with the serious tales in Boccaccio, they are slight

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and somewhat superficial. That Marcella, the fair shepherdess, is, I think, the best. I shall only add, that 'Don Quixote' was, at the time it was published, an entirely original work in its kind, and that the author claims the highest honour which can belong to one, that of being the inventor of a new style of writing. I have never read his 'Galatea,' nor his 'Loves of Persiles and Sigismunda,' though I have often meant to do it, and I hope to do so yet. Perhaps there is a reason lurking at the bottom of this dilatoriness: I am quite sure the reading of these works could not make me think higher of the author of 'Don Quixote,' and it might, for a moment or two, make me think less.

There is another Spanish novel, 'Guzman d'Alfarache,' nearly of the same age as 'Don Quixote,' and of great genius, though it can hardly be ranked as a novel or a work of imagination. It is a series of strange, unconnected adventures, rather drily told, but accompanied by the most severe and sarcastic commentary. The satire, the wit, the eloquence, and reasoning, are of the most potent kind: but they are didactic rather than dramatic. They would suit a homily or a pasquinade as well or better than a romance. Still there are in this extraordinary book occasional sketches of character and humorous descriptions, to which it would be difficult to produce anything superior. This work, which is hardly known in this country except by name, has the credit, without any reason, of being the original of 'Gil Blas.' There is one incident the same, that of the unsavoury ragout, which is served up for supper at the inn. In all other respects these two works are the very reverse of each other, both in their excellences and defects.—'Lazarillo de Tormes' has been more read than the 'Spanish Rogue,' and is a work more readable, on this account among others, that it is contained in a duodecimo instead of a folio volume. This, however, is long enough, considering that it treats of only one subject, that of eating, or rather the possibility of living without eating. Famine is here framed into an art, and feasting is banished far hence. The hero's time and thoughts are taken up in a thousand shifts to procure a dinner; and that failing, in tampering with his stomach till supper time, when being forced to go supperless to bed, he comforts himself with the hopes of a breakfast the next morning, of

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which being again disappointed, he reserves his appetite for a luncheon, and then has to stave it off again by some meagre excuse or other till dinner; and so on, by a perpetual adjournment of this necessary process, through the four-and-twenty hours round. The quantity of food proper to keep body and soul together is reduced to a *minimum;* and the most uninviting morsels with which Lazarillo meets once a week as a God's-send, are pampered into the most sumptuous fare by a long course of inanition. The scene of this novel could be laid nowhere so properly as in Spain, that land of priestcraft and poverty, where hunger seems to be the ruling passion, and starving the order of the day.

'Gil Blas' has, next to 'Don Quixote,' been more generally read and admired than any other novel; and in one sense deservedly so: for it is at the head of its class, though that class is very different from, and I should say inferior to the other. There is little individual character in 'Gil Blas.' The author is a describer of manners, and not of character. He does not take the elements of human nature, and work them up into new combinations (which is the excellence of 'Don Quixote;') nor trace the peculiar shifting shades of folly and knavery as they are to be found in real life (like Fielding:) but he takes off, as it were, the general, habitual impression which circumstances make on certain conditions of life, and moulds all his characters accordingly. All the persons whom he introduces carry about with them the badge of their profession, and you see little more of them than their costume. He describes men as belonging to distinct classes in society; not as they are in themselves, or with the individual differences which are always to be discovered in nature. His hero, in particular, has no character but that of the successive circumstances in which he is placed. His priests are only described as priests: his valets, his players, his women, his courtiers and his sharpers, are all alike. Nothing can well exceed the monotony of the work in this respect:—at the same time that nothing can exceed the truth and precision with which the general manners of these different characters are preserved, nor the felicity of the particular traits by which their common foibles are brought out. Thus the Archbishop of Grenada will

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remain an everlasting memento of the weakness of human vanity; and the account of Gil Blas' legacy, of the uncertainty of human expectations. This novel is also deficient in the fable as well as in the characters. It is not a regularly constructed story; but a series of amusing adventures told with equal gaiety and good sense, and in the most graceful style imaginable.

It has been usual to class our own great novelists as imitators of one or other of these two writers. Fielding, no doubt, is more like 'Don Quixote' than 'Gil Blas;' Smollett is more like 'Gil Blas' than 'Don Quixote;' but there is not much resemblance in either case. Sterne's 'Tristram Shandy' is a more direct instance of imitation. Richardson can scarcely be called an imitator of any one; or if he is, it is of the sentimental refinement of Marivaux, or of the verbose gallantry of the writers of the seventeenth century.

There is very little to warrant the common idea that Fielding was an imitator of Cervantes, except his own declaration of such an intention in the title-page of 'Joseph Andrews,' the romantic turn of the character of Parson Adams (the only romantic character in his works,) and the proverbial humour of Partridge, which is kept up only for a few pages. Fielding's novels are, in general, thoroughly his own; and they are thoroughly English. What they are most remarkable for, is neither sentiment, nor imagination, nor wit, nor even humour, though there is an immense deal of this last quality; but profound knowledge of human nature, at least of English nature, and masterly pictures of the characters of men as he saw them existing. This quality distinguishes all his works, and is shown almost equally in all of them. As a painter of real life, he was equal to Hogarth; as a mere observer of human nature, he was little inferior to Shakspeare, though without any of the genius and poetical qualities of his mind. His humour is less rich and laughable than Smollett's; his wit as often misses as hits; he has none of the fine pathos of Richardson or Sterne; but he has brought together a greater variety of characters in common life, marked with more distinct peculiarities, and without an atom of caricature, than any other novel writer whatever. The extreme subtlety of observation on the springs of human conduct in ordinary characters, is only equal-

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led by the ingenuity of contrivance in bringing those springs into play, in such a manner as to lay open their smallest irregularity. The detection is always complete, and made with the certainty and skill of a philosophical experiment, and the obviousness and familiarity of a casual observation. The truth of the imitation is indeed so great, that it has been argued that Fielding must have had his materials ready-made to his hands, and was merely a transcriber of local manners and individual habits. For this conjecture, however, there seems to be no foundation. His representations, it is true, are local and individual; but they are not the less profound and conclusive. The feeling of the general principles of human nature operating in particular circumstances, is always intense, and uppermost in his mind; and he makes use of incident and situation only to bring out character.

It is scarcely necessary to give any illustrations. 'Tom Jones' is full of them. There is the account, for example, of the gratitude of the elder Blifil to his brother, for assisting him to obtain the fortune of Miss Bridget Alworthy by marriage; and of the gratitude of the poor in his neighbourhood to Alworthy himself, who had done so much good in the country that he had made every one in it his enemy. There is the account of the Latin dialogues between Partridge and his maid, of the assault made on him during one of these by Mrs. Partridge, and the severe bruises he patiently received on that occasion, after which the parish of Little Baddington rung with the story, that the schoolmaster had killed his wife. There is the exquisite keeping in the character of Blifil, and the want of it in that of Jones. There is the gradation in the lovers of Molly Seagrim, the philosopher Square succeeding to Tom Jones, who again finds that he himself had succeeded to the accomplished Will Barnes who had the first possession of her person, and had still possession of her heart, Jones being only the instrument of her vanity, as Square was of her interest. Then there is the discreet honesty of Black George, the learning of Thwackum and Square, and the profundity of Squire Western, who considered it as a physical impossibility that his daughter should fall in love with Tom Jones. We have also that gentleman's disputes with his sister,

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and the inimitable appeal of that lady to her niece: "I was never so handsome as you, Sophy; yet I had something of you formerly. I was called the cruel Parthenissa. Kingdoms and states, as Tully Cicero says, undergo alteration, and so must the human form!" The adventure of the same lady with the highwayman, who robbed her of her jewels while he complimented her beauty, ought not to be passed over; nor that of Sophia and her muff, nor the reserved coquetry of her cousin Fitzpatrick, nor the description of Lady Bellaston, nor the modest overtures of the pretty widow Hunt, nor the indiscreet babblings of Mrs. Honour. The moral of this book has been objected to without much reason; but a more serious objection has been made to the want of refinement and elegance in two principal characters. We never feel this objection, indeed, while we are reading the book; but at other times we have something like a lurking suspicion that Jones was but an awkward fellow, and Sophia a pretty simpleton. I do not know how to account for this effect, unless it is that Fielding's constantly assuring us of the beauty of his hero, and the good sense of his heroine, at last produces a distrust of both. The story of 'Tom Jones' is allowed to be unrivalled; and it is this circumstance, together with the vast variety of characters, that has given the 'History of a Foundling' so decided a preference over Fielding's other novels. The characters themselves, both in 'Amelia' and 'Joseph Andrews,' are quite equal to any of those in 'Tom Jones.' The account of Miss Matthews and Ensign Hibbert in the former of these,—the way in which that lady reconciles herself to the death of her father,—the inflexible Colonel Bath, the insipid Mrs. James, the complaisant Colonel Trent, the demure, sly, intriguing, equivocal Mrs. Bennet, the lord who is her seducer, and who attempts afterwards to seduce Amelia by the same mechanical process of a concert-ticket, a book, and the disguise of a great coat,—his little, fat, short-nosed, red-faced, good-humoured accomplice, the keeper of the lodging-house, who, having no pretensions to gallantry herself, has a disinterested delight in forwarding the intrigues and pleasures of others (to say nothing of honest Atkinson, the story of the miniature-picture of Amelia, and the hashed mutton, which are in a different style,) are master-pieces

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of description. The whole scene at the lodging-house, the masquerade, &c., in 'Amelia,' are equal in interest to the parallel scenes in 'Tom Jones,' and even more refined in the knowledge of character. For instance, Mrs. Bennet is superior to Mrs. Fitzpatrick in her own way. The uncertainty in which the event of her interview with her former seducer is left, is admirable. Fielding was a master of what may be called the *double entendre* of character, and surprises you no less by what he leaves in the dark (hardly known to the persons themselves) than by the unexpected discoveries he makes of the real traits and circumstances in a character with which, till then, you find you were unacquainted. There is nothing at all heroic, however, in the usual style of his delineations. He does not draw lofty characters or strong passions; all his persons are of the ordinary stature as to intellect, and possess little elevation of fancy, or energy of purpose. Perhaps, after all, Parson Adams is his finest character. It is equally true to nature and more ideal than any of the others. Its unsuspecting simplicity makes it not only more amiable, but doubly amusing, by gratifying the sense of superior sagacity in the reader. Our laughing at him does not once lessen our respect for him. His declaring that he would willingly walk ten miles to fetch his sermon on vanity, merely to convince Wilson of his thorough contempt of this vice, and his consoling himself for the loss of his Æschylus by suddenly recollecting that he could not read it if he had it, because it is dark, are among the finest touches of *naïveté*. The night adventures at Lady Booby's with Beau Didapper and the amiable Slipslop are the most ludicrous; and that with the huntsman, who draws off the hounds from the poor parson because they would be spoiled by following *vermin*, the most profound. Fielding did not often repeat himself, but Dr. Harrison, in 'Amelia,' may be considered as a variation of the character of Adams; so also is Goldsmith's 'Vicar of Wakefield;' and the latter part of that work, which sets out so delightfully, an almost entire plagiarism from Wilson's account of himself, and Adams's domestic history.

Smollett's first novel, 'Roderick Random,' which is also his best, appeared about the same time as Fielding's 'Tom Jones,'

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and yet it has a much more modern air with it; but this may be accounted for from the circumstance that Smollett was quite a young man at the time, whereas Fielding's manner must have been formed long before. The style of 'Roderick Random' is more easy and flowing than that of 'Tom Jones;' the incidents follow one another more rapidly (though, it must be confessed, they never come in such a throng, or are brought out with the same dramatic effect;) the humour is broader, and as effectual; and there is very nearly, if not quite, an equal interest excited by the story. What, then, is it that gives the superiority to Fielding? It is the superior insight into the springs of human character, and the constant developement of that character through every change of circumstance. Smollett's humour often arises from the situation of the persons, or the peculiarity of their external appearance; as, from Roderick Random's carroty locks, which hung down over his shoulders like a pound of candles, or Strap's ignorance of London, and the blunders that follow from it. There is a tone of vulgarity about all his productions. The incidents frequently resemble detached anecdotes taken from a newspaper or magazine; and, like those in 'Gil Blas,' might happen to a hundred other characters. He exhibits the ridiculous accidents and reverses to which human life is liable, not "the stuff" of which it is composed. He seldom probes to the quick, or penetrates beyond the surface; and, therefore, he leaves no stings in the minds of his readers, and in this respect is far less interesting than Fielding. His novels always enliven, and never tire us; we take them up with pleasure, and lay them down without any strong feeling of regret. We look on and laugh, as spectators of a highly amusing scene, without closing in with the combatants, or being made parties in the event. We read 'Roderick Random' as an entertaining story, for the particular accidents and modes of life which it describes have ceased to exist; but we regard 'Tom Jones' as a real history, because the author never stops short of those essential principles which lie at the bottom of all our actions, and in which we feel an immediate interest—*intus et in cute*. Smollett excels most as the lively caricaturist: Fielding as the exact painter and profound metaphysician. I am far from maintaining that this ac-

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count applies uniformly to the productions of these two writers; but I think that, as far as they essentially differ, what I have stated is the general distinction between them. 'Roderick Random' is the purest of Smollett's novels: I mean in point of style and description. Most of the incidents and characters are supposed to have been taken from the events of his own life; and are, therefore, truer to nature. There is a rude conception of generosity in some of his characters, of which Fielding seems to have been incapable, his amiable persons being merely good-natured. It is owing to this that Strap is superior to Partridge; as there is a heartiness and warmth of feeling in some of the scenes between Lieutenant Bowling and his nephew, which is beyond Fielding's power of impassioned writing. The whole of the scene on ship-board is a most admirable and striking picture, and, I imagine, very little if at all exaggerated, though the interest it excites is of a very unpleasant kind, because the irritation and resistance to petty oppression can be of no avail. The picture of the little profligate French friar, who was Roderick's travelling companion, and of whom he always kept to the windward, is one of Smollett's most masterly sketches.—'Peregrine Pickle' is no great favourite of mine, and 'Launcelot Greaves' was not worthy of the genius of the author.

'Humphry Clinker' and 'Count Fathom' are both equally admirable in their way. Perhaps the former is the most pleasant gossiping novel that was ever written; that which gives the most pleasure with the least effort to the reader. It is quite as amusing as going the journey could have been; and we have just as good an idea of what happened on the road as if we had been of the party. Humphry Clinker himself is exquisite; and his sweetheart, Winifred Jenkins, not much behind him. Matthew Bramble, though not altogether original, is excellently supported, and seems to have been the prototype of Sir Anthony Absolute in the 'Rivals.' But Lismahago is the flower of the flock. His tenaciousness in argument is not so delightful as the relaxation of his logical severity, when he finds his fortune mellowing in the wintry smiles of Mrs. Tabitha Bramble. This is the best preserved, and most severe of all Smollett's characters. The resemblance to 'Don Quixote' is only just

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enough to make it interesting to the critical reader, without giving offence to anybody else. The indecency and filth in this novel are what must be allowed to all Smollett's writings.—The subject and characters in 'Count Fathom' are, in general, exceedingly disgusting: the story is also spun out to a degree of tediousness in the serious and sentimental parts; but there is more power of writing occasionally shown in it than in any of his works. I need only refer to the fine and bitter irony of the Count's address to the country of his ancestors on his landing in England; to the robber scene in the forest, which has never been surpassed; to the Parisian swindler who personates a raw English country squire (Western is tame in the comparison;) and to the story of the seduction in the west of England. It would be difficult to point out, in any author, passages written with more force and mastery than these.

It is not a very difficult undertaking to class Fielding or Smollett;—the one as an observer of the characters of human life, the other as a describer of its various eccentricities. But it is by no means so easy to dispose of Richardson, who was neither an observer of the one nor a describer of the other, but who seemed to spin his materials entirely out of his own brain, as if there had been nothing existing in the world beyond the little room in which he sat writing. There is an artificial reality about his works which is nowhere else to be met with. They have the romantic air of a pure fiction, with the literal minuteness of a common diary. The author had the strongest matter-of-fact imagination that ever existed, and wrote the oddest mixture of poetry and prose. He does not appear to have taken advantage of anything in actual nature from one end of his works to the other; and yet, throughout all his works, voluminous as they are (and this, to be sure, is one reason why they are so,)—he sets about describing every object and transaction, as if the whole had been given in on evidence by an eye-witness. This kind of high finishing from imagination is an anomaly in the history of human genius; and certainly nothing so fine was ever produced by the same accumulation of minute parts. There is not the least distraction, the least forgetfulness of the end—every circumstance is made to tell. I cannot agree that this

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exactness of detail produces heaviness; on the contrary, it gives an appearance of truth, and a positive interest to the story; and we listen with the same attention as we should to the particulars of a confidential communication. I at one time used to think some parts of Sir Charles Grandison rather trifling and tedious, especially the long description of Miss Harriet Byron's wedding-clothes, till I was told of two young ladies who had severally copied out the whole of that very description for their own private gratification. After that I could not blame the author.

The effect of reading this work is like an increase of kindred. You find yourself all of a sudden introduced into the midst of a large family, with aunts and cousins to the third and fourth generation, and grandmothers both by the father's and mother's side; and a very odd set of people they are, but people whose real existence and personal identity you can no more dispute than your own senses, for you see and hear all that they do or say. What is still more extraordinary, all this extreme elaborateness in working out the story seems to have cost the author nothing; for, it is said, that the published works are mere abridgments. I have heard (though this I suspect must be a pleasant exaggeration) that Sir Charles Grandison was originally written in eight-and-twenty volumes.

Pamela is the first of Richardson's productions, and the very child of his brain. Taking the general idea of the character of a modest and beautiful country girl, and of the ordinary situation in which she is placed, he makes out all the rest, even to the smallest circumstance, by the mere force of a reasoning imagination. It would seem as if a step lost, would be as fatal here as in a mathematical demonstration. The developement of the character is the most simple, and comes the nearest to nature that it can do, without being the same thing. The interest of the story increases with the dawn of understanding and reflection in the heroine: her sentiments gradually expand themselves, like opening flowers. She writes better every time, and acquires a confidence in herself, just as a girl would do, in writing such letters in such circumstances; and yet it is certain that no girl would write such letters in such circumstances. What I mean is this:—Richardson's nature is always the nature

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of sentiment and reflection, not of impulse or situation. He furnishes his characters, on every occasion, with the presence of mind of the author. He makes them act, not as they would from the impulse of the moment, but as they might upon reflection, and upon a careful review of every motive and circumstance in their situation. They regularly sit down to write letters: and if the business of life consisted in letter-writing, and was carried on by the post (like a Spanish game at chess,) human nature would be what Richardson represents it. All actual objects and feelings are blunted and deadened by being presented through a medium which may be true to reason, but is false in nature. He confounds his own point of view with that of the immediate actors in the scene; and hence presents you with a conventional and factitious nature, instead of that which is real. Dr. Johnson seems to have preferred this truth of reflection to the truth of nature, when he said that there was more knowledge of the human heart in a page of Richardson, than in all Fielding. Fielding, however, saw more of the practical results, and understood the principles as well; but he had not the same power of speculating upon their possible results, and combining them in certain ideal forms of passion and imagination, which was Richardson's real excellence.

It must be observed, however, that it is this mutual good understanding and comparing of notes between the author and the persons he describes, his infinite circumspection, his exact process of ratiocination and calculation, which gives such an appearance of coldness and formality to most of his characters, —which makes prudes of his women and coxcombs of his men. Everything is too conscious in his works. Everything is distinctly brought home to the mind of the actors in the scene, which is a fault undoubtedly: but then, it must be confessed, everything is brought home in its full force to the mind of the reader also; and we feel the same interest in the story as if it were our own. Can anything be more beautiful or more affecting than Pamela's reproaches to her "lumpish heart," when she is sent away from her master's at her own request; its lightness when she is sent for back; the joy which the conviction of the sincerity of his love diffuses in her heart, like the

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coming on of spring; the artifice of the stuff gown; the meeting with Lady Davers after her marriage; and the trial-scene with her husband? Who ever remained insensible to the passion of Lady Clementina, except Sir Charles Grandison himself, who was the object of it? Clarissa is, however, his masterpiece, if we except Lovelace. If she is fine in herself, she is still finer in his account of her. With that foil, her purity is dazzling indeed: and she who could triumph by her virtue, and the force of her love, over the regality of Lovelace's mind, his wit, his person, his accomplishments, and his spirit, conquers all hearts. I should suppose that never sympathy more deep or sincere was excited than by the heroine of Richardson's romance, except by the calamities of real life. The links in this wonderful chain of interest are not more finely wrought, than their whole weight is overwhelming and irresistible. Who can forget the exquisite gradations of her long dying-scene, or the closing of the coffin-lid, when Miss Howe comes to take her last leave of her friend; or the heart-breaking reflection that Clarissa makes on what was to have been her wedding day? Well does a certain writer exclaim—

> "Books are a real world, both pure and good,
> Round which, with tendrils strong as flesh and blood,
> Our pastime and our happiness may grow!"

Richardson's wit was unlike that of any other writer—his humour was so too. Both were the effect of intense activity of mind—laboured, and yet completely effectual. I might refer to Lovelace's reception and description of Hickman, when he calls out Death in his ear, as the name of the person with whom Clarissa had fallen in love; and to the scene at the glove-shop. What can be more magnificent than his enumeration of his companions—"Belton, so pert and so pimply—Tourville, so fair and so foppish!" &c. In casuistry this author is quite at home; and, with a boldness greater even than his puritanical severity, has exhausted every topic on virtue and vice. There is another peculiarity in Richardson, not perhaps so uncommon, which is, his systematically preferring his most insipid characters to his finest, though both were equally his own invention,

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and he must be supposed to have understood something of their qualities. Thus he preferred the little, selfish, affected, insignificant Miss Byron, to the divine Clementina; and again, Sir Charles Grandison to the nobler Lovelace. I have nothing to say in favour of Lovelace's morality; but Sir Charles is the prince of coxcombs,—whose eye was never once taken from his own person and his own virtues; and there is nothing which excites so little sympathy as this excessive egotism.

It remains to speak of Sterne; and I shall do it in few words. There is more of mannerism and affectation in him, and a more immediate reference to preceding authors; but his excellences, where he is excellent, are of the first order. His characters are intellectual and inventive, like Richardson's, but totally opposite in the execution. The one are made out by continuity, and patient repetition of touches; the others, by glancing transitions and graceful apposition. His style is equally different from Richardson's: it is at times the most rapid, the most happy, the most idiomatic of any that is to be found. It is the pure essence of English conversational style. His works consist only of *morceaux*—of brilliant passages. I wonder that Goldsmith, who ought to have known better, should call him "a dull fellow." His wit is poignant, though artificial; and his characters (though the groundwork of some of them had been laid before) have yet invaluable original differences; and the spirit of the execution the master-strokes constantly thrown into them, are not to be surpassed. It is sufficient to name them:—Yorick, Dr. Slop, Mr. Shandy, My Uncle Toby, Trim, Susanna, and the Widow Wadman. In these he has contrived to oppose, with equal felicity and originality, two characters, one of pure intellect, and the other of pure good nature, in My Father and My Uncle Toby. There appears to have been in Sterne a vein of dry, sarcastic humour, and of extreme tenderness of feeling; the latter sometimes carried to affectation, as in the tale of Maria, and the apostrophe to the recording angel; but at other times pure, and without blemish. The story of Le Fevre is perhaps the finest in the English language. My Father's restlessness, both of body and mind, is inimitable. It is the model from which all those

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despicable performances against modern philosophy ought to have been copied, if their authors had known anything of the subject they were writing about. My Uncle Toby is one of the finest compliments ever paid to human nature. He is the most unoffending of God's creatures; or, as the French express it, *un tel petit bon homme!* Of his bowling-green, his sieges, and his amours, who would say or think any thing amiss!

It is remarkable that our four best novel-writers belong nearly to the same age. We also owe to the same period (the reign of George II.) the inimitable Hogarth, and some of our best writers of the middle style of comedy. If I were called upon to account for this coincidence, I should waive the consideration of more general causes, and ascribe it at once to the establishment of the Protestant ascendancy, and the succession of the House of Hanover. These great events appear to have given a more popular turn to our literature and genius, as well as to our government. It was found high time that the people should be represented in books as well as in Parliament. They wished to see some account of themselves in what they read; and not to be confined always to the vices, the miseries, and frivolities of the great. Our domestic tragedy, and our earliest periodical works, appeared a little before the same period. In despotic countries, human nature is not of sufficient importance to be studied or described. The *canaille* are objects rather of disgust than curiosity; and there are no middle classes. The works of Racine and Moliere are either imitations of the verbiage of the court, before which they were represented, or fanciful caricatures of the manners of the lowest of the people. But in the period of our history in question, a security of person and property, and a freedom of opinion had been established, which made every man feel of some consequence to himself, and appear an object of some curiosity to his neighbours: our manners become more domesticated; there was a general spirit of sturdiness and independence, which made the English character more truly English than perhaps at any other period—that is, more tenacious of its own opinions and purposes. The whole surface of society appeared cut out into square enclosures and sharp angles, which extended to the dresses of the time, their

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gravel-walks and clipped hedges. Each individual had a certain ground-plot of his own to cultivate his particular humours in, and let them shoot out at pleasure; and a most plentiful crop they have produced accordingly. The reign of George II. was, in a word, the age of *hobby-horses:* but, since that period, things have taken a different turn.

His present Majesty (God save the mark!) during almost the whole of his reign, has been constantly mounted on a great war-horse; and has fairly driven all competitors out of the field. Instead of minding our own affairs, or laughing at each other, the eyes of all his faithful subjects have been fixed on the career of the sovereign, and all hearts anxious for the safety of his person and government. Our pens and our swords have been alike drawn in their defence; and the returns of killed and wounded, the manufacture of newspapers and parliamentary speeches, have exceeded all former example. If we have had a little of the blessings of peace, we have had enough of the glories and calamities of war. His Majesty has indeed contrived to keep alive the greatest public interest ever known, by his determined manner of riding his hobby for half a century together, with the aristocracy, the democracy, the clergy, the landed and monied interest, and the rabble, in full cry after him;—and at the end of his career, most happily and unexpectedly succeeded, amidst empires lost and won, kingdoms overturned and created, and the destruction of an incredible number of lives, in restoring *the divine right of kings*, and thus preventing any future abuse of the example which seated his family on the throne!

It is not to be wondered at, if amidst the tumults of events crowded into this period, our literature has partaken of the disorder of the time; if our prose has run mad, and our poetry grown childish. Among those persons who "have kept the even tenor of their way," the author of 'Evelina,' 'Cecilia,' and 'Camilla,' must be allowed to hold a distinguished place.* Mrs.

* 'The Fool of Quality,' 'David Simple,' and 'Sydney Bidulph,' written about the middle of the last century, belong to the ancient *regime* of novel-writing. Of the 'Vicar of Wakefield' I have attempted a character elsewhere.

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Radcliffe's "enchantments drear," and mouldering castles, derived part of their interest, no doubt, from the supposed tottering state of all old structures at the time; and Mrs. Inchbald's 'Nature and Art' would scarcely have had the same popularity, but that it fell in (as to its two main characters) with the prevailing prejudice of the moment, that judges and bishops were not invariably pure abstractions of justice and piety. Mrs. Edgeworth's 'Tales,' again, (with the exception of 'Castle Rack-rent,' which is a genuine, unsophisticated, national portrait) are a kind of pedantic, pragmatical, common sense, tinctured with the pertness and pretensions of the paradoxes to which they are so self-complacently opposed. Madame D'Arblay is, on the contrary, quite of the old school, a mere common observer of manners, and also a very woman. It is this last circumstance which forms the peculiarity of her writings, and distinguishes them from those masterpieces which I have before mentioned. She is a quick, lively, and accurate observer of persons and things; but she always looks at them with a consciousness of her sex, and in that point of view in which it is the particular business and interest of women to observe them. There is little in her works of passion or character, or even manners, in the most extended sense of the word, as implying the sum-total of our habits and pursuits; her *forte* is in describing the absurdities and affectations of external behaviour, or the manners of people in company. Her characters, which are ingenious caricatures, are, no doubt, distinctly marked, and well kept up; but they are slightly shaded, and exceedingly uniform. Her heroes and heroines, almost all of them, depend on the stock of a single phrase or sentiment, and have certain mottoes or devices by which they may always be known. They form such characters as people might be supposed to assume for a night at a masquerade. She presents not the whole-length figure, nor even the face, but some prominent feature. In one of her novels, for example, a lady appears regularly every ten pages, to get a lesson in music for nothing. She never appears for any other purpose; this is all you know of her; and in this the whole wit and humour of the character consists. Meadows is the same, who has always the cue of being tired, without any other idea. It has been said of Shak-

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speare, that you may always assign his speeches to the proper characters; and you may infallibly do the same thing with Madame D'Arblay's, for they always say the same thing. The Braughton's are the best. Mr. Smith is an exquisite city portrait. 'Evelina' is also her best novel, because it is the shortest; that is, it has all the liveliness in the sketches of character, and smartness of comic dialogue and repartee, without the tediousness of the story, and endless affectation of sentiment which disfigures the others.

Women, in general, have a quicker perception of any oddity or singularity of character than men, and are more alive to every absurdity which arises from a violation of the rules of society, or a deviation from established custom. This partly arises from the restraints on their own behaviour, which turn their attention constantly on the subject, and partly from other causes. The surface of their minds, like that of their bodies, seems of a finer texture than ours; more soft, and susceptible of immediate impulses. They have less muscular strength, less power of continued voluntary attention, of reason, passion, and imagination; but they are more easily impressed with whatever appeals to their senses or habitual prejudices. The intuitive perception of their minds is less disturbed by any abstruse reasonings on causes or consequences. They learn the idiom of character and manners, as they acquire that of language, by rote, without troubling themselves about the principles. Their observation is not the less accurate on that account, as far as it goes, for it has been well said that "there is nothing so true as habit."

There is little other power in Madame D'Arblay's novels than that of immediate observation; her characters, whether of refinement or vulgarity, are equally superficial and confined. The whole is a question of form, whether that form is adhered to or infringed upon. It is this circumstance which takes away dignity and interest from her story and sentiments, and makes the one so teazing and tedious, and the other so insipid. The difficulties in which she involves her heroines are too much 'Female Difficulties;' they are difficulties created out of nothing. The author appears to have no other idea of refinement than it is the reverse of vulgarity; but the reverse of vulgarity is fastidious-

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ness and affectation. There is a true and a false delicacy. Because a vulgar country Miss would answer "yes" to a proposal of marriage in the first page, Madame D'Arblay makes it a proof of an excess of refinement, and an indispensable point of etiquette in her young ladies to postpone the answer to the end of five volumes, without the smallest reason for their doing so, and with every reason to the contrary. The reader is led every moment to expect a *denouement*, and is as often disappointed on some trifling pretext. The whole artifice of her fable consists in coming to no conclusion. Her ladies "stand so upon the order of their going," that they do not go at all. They will not abate an ace of their punctilio in any circumstances or on any emergency. They would consider it as quite indecorous to run down stairs though the house were in flames, or to move an inch off the pavement though a scaffolding was falling. She has formed to herself an abstract idea of perfection in common behaviour, which is quite as romantic and impracticable as any other idea of the sort; and the consequence has naturally been that she makes her heroines commit the greatest improprieties and absurdities in order to avoid the smallest. In opposition to a maxim in philosophy, they constantly act from the weakest motive, or rather from pure contradiction. The whole tissue of the fable is, in general, more wild and chimerical than anything in 'Don Quixote,' without the poetical truth or elevation. Madame D'Arblay has woven a web of difficulties for her heroines, something like the green silken threads in which the shepherdesses entangled the steed of Cervantes' hero, who swore, in his fine enthusiastic way, that he would sooner cut his passage to another world than disturb the least of those beautiful meshes. To mention the most painful instance—the 'Wanderer,' in her last novel, raises obstacles lighter than "the gossamer that idles in the wanton summer air," into insurmountable barriers; and trifles with those that arise out of common sense, reason, and necessity. Her conduct is not to be accounted for directly out of the circumstances in which she is placed, but out of some factitious and misplaced refinement on them. It is a perpetual game at cross-purposes. There being a plain and strong motive why she should pursue any course of action, is a sufficient reason

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for her to avoid it, and the perversity of her conduct is in proportion to its levity—as the lightness of the feather baffles the force of the impulse that is given to it, and the slightest breath of air turns it back on the hand from which it is thrown. We can hardly consider this as the perfection of the female character!

I must say I like Mrs. Radcliffe's romances better, and think of them oftener; and even when I do not, part of the impression with which I survey the full-orbed moon shining in the blue expanse of heaven, or hear the wind sighing through the autumnal leaves, or walk under the echoing archways of a Gothic ruin, is owing to a repeated perusal of the 'Romance of the Forest,' and the 'Mysteries of Udolpho.' Her descriptions of scenery, indeed, are vague and wordy to the last degree; they are neither like Salvator nor Claude, nor nature nor art; and she dwells on the effects of moonlight till we are sometimes weary of them; her characters are insipid, the shadows of a shade, continued on, under different names, through all her novels; her story comes to nothing. But in harrowing up the soul with imaginary horrors, and making the flesh creep, and the nerves thrill with fond hopes and fears, she is unrivalled among her fair country-women. Her great power lies in describing the indefinable, and embodying a phantom. She makes her readers twice children; and from the dim and shadowy veil which she draws over the objects of her fancy, forces us to believe all that is strange, and next to impossible, of their mysterious agency; whether it is the sound of the lover's lute borne o'er the distant waters along the winding shores of Provence, recalling with its magic breath, some long-lost friendship or some hopeless love; or the full choir of the cloistered monks, chaunting their midnight orgies; or the lonely voice of an unhappy sister in her pensive cell, like angels' whispered music; or the deep sigh that steals from a dungeon on the startled ear; or the dim apparition of ghastly features; or the face of an assassin hid beneath a monk's cowl; or the robber gliding through the twilight gloom of the forest. All the fascination that links the world of passion to the world unknown is hers, and she plays with it at her pleasure; she has all the poetry of romance, all that is obscure, visionary, and objectless in the imagination. It

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seems that the simple notes of Clara's lute, which so delighted her youthful heart, still echo among the rocks and mountains of the Valois; the mellow tones of the minstrel's songs still mingle with the noise of the dashing oar, and the rippling of the silver waves of the Mediterranean; the voice of Agnes is heard from the haunted tower, and Schedoni's form still stalks through the frowning ruins of Palinzi. The greatest treat, however, which Mrs. Radcliffe's pen has provided for the lovers of the marvellous and terrible is the Provençal tale which Ludovico reads in the Castle of Udolpho as the lights are beginning to burn blue, and just before the faces appear from behind the tapestry that carry him off, and we hear no more of him. This tale is of a knight, who being engaged in a dance at some high festival of old romance, was summoned out by another knight clad in complete steel; and being solemnly adjured to follow him into the mazes of the neighbouring wood, his conductor brought him at length to a hollow glade in the thickest part, where he pointed to the murdered corse of another knight, and lifting up his beavet showed him by the gleam of moonlight which fell on it, that it had the face of his spectre-guide! The dramatic power in the character of Schedoni, the Italian monk, has been much admired and praised; but the effect does not depend upon the character, but the situations; not upon the figure, but upon the background. The 'Castle of Otranto' (which is supposed to have led the way to this style of writing) is, to my notion, dry, meagre, and without effect. It is done upon false principles of taste. The great hand and arm which are thrust into the court-yard, and remain there all day long, are the pasteboard machinery of a pantomime; they shock the senses, and have no purchase upon the imagination. They are a matter-of-fact impossibility; a fixture, and no longer a phantom. *Quod sic mihi ostendis, incredulus odi.* By realising the chimeras of ignorance and fear, begot upon shadows and dim likenesses, we take away the very grounds of credulity and superstition; and, as in other cases, by facing out the imposture betray the secret to the contempt and laughter of the spectators. The 'Recess,' and the 'Old English Baron,' are also "dismal treatises," but with little in them "at which our fell of hair is like to rouse and stir as life were in it."

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They are dull and prosing, without the spirit of fiction or the air of tradition to make them interesting. After Mrs. Radcliffe, Monk Lewis was the greatest master of the art of freezing the blood. The robber-scene in the 'Monk' is only inferior to that in 'Count Fathom,' and perfectly new in the circumstances and cast of the characters. Some of his descriptions are chargeable with unpardonable grossness, but the pieces of poetry interspersed in this far-famed novel, such as the fight of Roncesvalles and the Exile, in particular, have a romantic and delightful harmony, such as might be chaunted by the moon-light pilgrim, or might lull the dreaming mariner on summer seas.

If Mrs. Radcliffe touched the trembling chords of the imagination, making wild music there, Mrs. Inchbald has no less power over the springs of the heart. She not only moves the affections but melts us into "all the luxury of woe." Her 'Nature and Art' is one of the most pathetic and interesting stories in the world. It is, indeed, too much so; or the distress is too naked, and the situations hardly to be borne with patience. I think nothing, however, can exceed in delicacy and beauty the account of the love-letter which the poor girl, who is the subject of the story, receives from her lover, and which she is a fortnight in spelling out, sooner than show it to any one else; nor the dreadful catastrophe of the last fatal scene, in which the same poor creature, as her former seducer, now become her judge, is about to pronounce sentence of death upon her, cries out in agony—"Oh, not from you!" The effect of this novel upon the feelings, is not only of the most distressing, but withering kind. It blights the sentiments, and haunts the memory. The 'Simple Story' is not much better in this respect: the gloom, however, which hangs over it is of a more fixed and tender kind: we are not now lifted to ecstasy, only to be plunged into madness; and besides the sweetness and dignity of some of the characters, there are redeeming traits, retrospective glances on the course of human life, which brighten the backward stream, and smile in hope or patience to the last. Such is the account of Sandford, her stern and inflexible adviser, sitting by the bedside of Miss Milner, and comforting her in her dying moments; thus soften-

worst pang of human nature, and reconciling us to the

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best, but not most shining virtues in human character. The conclusion of 'Nature and Art,' on the contrary, is a scene of heartless desolation, which must effectually deter any one from ever reading the book twice. Mrs. Inchbald is an instance to confute the assertion of Rousseau, that women fail whenever they attempt to describe the passion of love.

I shall conclude this Lecture, by saying a few words of the author of 'Caleb Williams,' and the author of 'Waverley.' I shall speak of the last first. In knowledge, in variety, in facility, in truth of painting, in costume and scenery, in freshness of subject, and in untired interest, in glancing lights and the graces of a style passing at will "from grave to gay, from lively to severe," at once romantic and familiar, having the utmost force of imitation and apparent freedom of invention; these novels have the highest claims to admiration. What lack they yet? The author has all power given him from without—he has not, perhaps, an equal power from within. The intensity of the feeling is not equal to the distinctness of the imagery. He sits like a magician in his cell, and conjures up all shapes and sights to the view; and with a little variation we might apply to him what Spenser says of Fancy:—

> "His chamber was dispainted all within
> With sundry colours, in the which were writ
> Infinite shapes of things dispersed thin;
> Some such as in the world were never yet;
> Some daily scene and knowen by their names,
> Such as in idle fantasies do flit;
> Infernal hags, centaurs, fiends, hippodames,
> Apes, lions, eagles, owls, fools, lovers, children, dames."

In the midst of all this phantasmagoria, the author himself never appears to take part with his characters, to prompt our affection to the good, or sharpen our antipathy to the bad. It is the perfection of art to conceal art; and this is here done so completely, that while it adds to our pleasure in the work, it seems to take away from the merit of the author. As he does not thrust himself forward in the foreground, he loses the credit of the performance. The copies are so true to nature, that they appear like tapestry figures taken off by the pattern; the obvious patch-

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work of tradition and history. His characters are transplanted at once from their native soil to the page which we are reading, without any traces of their having passed through the hot-bed of the author's genius or vanity. He leaves them as he found them; but this is doing wonders. The Laird and the Baillie of Bradwardine, the idiot rhymer, David Gallatly, Miss Rose Bradwardine, and Miss Flora Mac Ivor, her brother the Highland Jacobite chieftain, Vic Ian Vhor, the Highland rover, Donald Bean Lean, and the worthy page Callum Beg, Bothwell and Balfour of Burley, Claverhouse and Macbriar, Elshie the Black Dwarf, and the Red Reever of Westburn Flat, Hobbie and Grace Armstrong, Ellengowan and Dominie Sampson, Dirk Hatteraick and Meg Merrilies, are at present "familiar in our mouths as household names," and whether they are actual persons or creations of the poet's pen, is an impertinent inquiry. The picturesque and local scenery is as fresh as the lichen on the rock: the characters are a part of the scenery. If they are put in action, it is a moving picture: if they speak, we hear their dialect and the tones of their voice. If the humour is made out by dialect, the character by the dress, the interest by the facts and documents in the author's possession, we have no right to complain, if it is made out; but sometimes it hardly is, and then we have a right to say so. For instance, in the 'Tales of my Landlord,' Canny Elshie is not in himself so formidable or petrific a person as the real Black Dwarf, called David Ritchie, nor are his acts or sayings so staggering to the imagination. Again, the first introduction of this extraordinary personage, groping about among the hoary twilight ruins of the witch of Micklestane Moor and her Grey Geese, is as full of perternatural power and bewildering effect (according to the tradition of the country) as can be; while the last decisive scene, where the Dwarf, in his resumed character of Sir Edward Mauley, comes from the tomb in the Chapel, to prevent the forced marriage of the daughter of his former betrothed mistress with the man she abhors, is altogether powerless and tame. No situation could be imagined more finely calculated to call forth an author's powers of imagination and passion; but nothing is done. The assembly is dispersed under

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circumstances of the strongest natural feeling, and the most appalling preternatural appearances, just as if the effect had been produced by a peace-officer entering for the same purpose. These instances of a falling-off are, however, rare; and if this author should not be supposed by fastidious critics to have original genius in the highest degree, he has other qualities which supply its place so well, his materials are so rich and varied, and he uses them so lavishly, that the reader is no loser by the exchange. We are not in fear that he should publish another novel; we are under no apprehension of his exhausting himself, for he has shown that he is inexhaustible.

Whoever else is, it is pretty clear that the author of 'Caleb Williams' and 'St. Leon' is not the author of 'Waverley.' Nothing can be more distinct or excellent in their several ways than these two writers. If the one owes almost everything to external observation and traditional character, the other owes everything to internal conception and contemplation of the possible workings of the human mind. There is little knowledge of the world, little variety, neither an eye for the picturesque, nor a talent for the humorous in 'Caleb Williams' for instance, but you cannot doubt for a moment of the originality of the work and the force of the conception. The impression made upon the reader is the exact measure of the strength of the author's genius. For the effect, both in 'Caleb Williams' and 'St. Leon,' is entirely made out, neither by facts, nor dates, by black-letter or magazine learning, by transcript or record, but by intense and patient study of the human heart, and by an imagination projecting itself into certain situations, and capable of working up its imaginary feelings to the height of reality. The author launches into the ideal world, and must sustain himself and the reader there by the mere force of imagination. The sense of power in the writer thus adds to the interest of the subject.—The character of Falkland is a sort of apotheosis of the love of fame. The gay, the gallant Falkland lives only in the good opinion of good men; for this he adorns his soul with virtue, and tarnishes it with crime; he lives only with this, and dies as he loses it. He is a lover of virtue but a worshipper of fame. Stung to madness by a brutal insult, he avenges himself

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by a crime of the deepest die, and the remorse of his conscience and the stain upon his honour prey upon his peace and reason ever after. It was into the mouth of such a character that a modern poet has well put the words,

> "——— Action is momentary,
> The motion of a muscle, this way or that;
> Suffering is long, obscure, and infinite."

In the conflict of his feelings he is worn to a skeleton, wasted to a shadow. But he endures this living death to watch over his undying reputation, and to preserve his name unsullied and free from suspicion. But he is at last disappointed in this his darling object, by the very means he takes to secure it, and by harassing and goading Caleb Williams (whose insatiable, incessant curiosity had wormed itself into his confidence) to a state of desperation, by employing every sort of persecution, and by trying to hunt him from society like an infection, makes him turn upon him, and betray the inmost secret of his soul. The last moments of Falkland are indeed sublime: the spark of life and the hope of imperishable renown are extinguished in him together; and bending his last look of forgiveness on his victim and destroyer, he dies a martyr to fame, but a confessor at the shrine of virtue! The re-action and play of these two characters into each other's hands (like Othello and Iago) is inimitably well managed, and on a par with anything in the dramatic art; but Falkland is the hero of the story, Caleb Williams is only the instrument of it. This novel is utterly unlike anything else that ever was written, and is one of the most original as well as powerful productions in the English language. 'St. Leon' is not equal to it in the plot and ground-work, though perhaps superior in the execution. In the one Mr. Godwin has hit upon the extreme point of the perfectly natural and perfectly new; in the other he enters into the preternatural world, and comes nearer to the world of common place. Still the character is of the same exalted intellectual kind. As the ruling passion of the one was the love of fame, so in the other the sole business of life is thought. Raised by the fatal discovery of the philosopher's stone above mortality, he is cut off from all participation

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with its pleasures. He is a limb torn from society. In possession of eternal youth and beauty, he can feel no love; surrounded, tantalized, tormented with riches, he can do no good. The races of men pass before him as in a *speculum;* but he is attached to them by no common tie of sympathy or suffering. He is thrown back into himself and his own thoughts. He lives in the solitude of his own breast,—without wife or child, or friend, or enemy in the world. His is the solitude of the soul,—not of woods, or seas, or mountains,—but the desert of society, the waste and desolation of the heart. He is himself alone. His existence is purely contemplative, and is therefore intolerable to one who has felt the rapture of affection or the anguish of woe. The contrast between the enthusiastic eagerness of human pursuits and their blank disappointment, was never, perhaps, more finely pourtrayed than in this novel. Marguerite, the wife of St. Leon, is an instance of pure and disinterested affection in one of the noblest of her sex. It is not improbable that the author found the model of this character in nature.—Of 'Mandeville,' I shall say only one word. It appears to me to be a falling off in the subject, not in the ability. The style and declamation are even more powerful than ever. But unless an author surpasses himself, and surprises the public as much the fourth or fifth time as he did the first, he is said to fall off, because there is not the same stimulus of novelty. A great deal is here made out of nothing, or out of a very disagreeable subject. I cannot agree that the story is out of nature. The feeling is very common indeed; though carried to an unusual and improbable excess, or to one with which from the individuality and minuteness of the circumstances, we cannot readily sympathise.

It is rare that a philosopher is a writer of romances. The union of the two characters in this author is a sort of phenomenon in the history of letters; for I cannot but consider the author of 'Political Justice' as a philosophical reasoner of no ordinary stamp or pretensions. That work, whatever its defects may be, is distinguished by the most acute and severe logic, and by the utmost boldness of thinking, founded on a love and conviction of truth. It is a system of ethics, and one that, though I think

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it erroneous myself, is built on following up into its fair consequences, a very common and acknowledged principle, that abstract reason and general utility are the only test and standard of moral rectitude. If this principle is true, then the system is true: but I think that Mr. Godwin's book has done more than anything else to overturn the sufficiency of this principle by abstracting, in a strict metaphysical process, the influence of reason or the understanding in moral questions and relations from that of habit, sense, association, local and personal attachment, natural affection, &c.; and by thus making it appear how necessary the latter are to our limited, imperfect, and mixed being, how impossible the former as an exclusive guide of action, unless man were, or were capable of becoming, a purely intellectual being. Reason is no doubt one faculty of the human mind, and the chief gift of Providence to man; but it must itself be subject to and modified by other instincts and principles, because it is not the only one. This work then, even supposing it to be false, is invaluable, as demonstrating an important truth by the *reductio ad absurdum;* or it is an *experimentum crucis* in one of the grand and trying questions of moral philosophy.—In delineating the character and feelings of the hermetic philosopher St. Leon, perhaps the author had not far to go from those of a speculative philosophical Recluse. He who deals in the secrets of magic, or in the secrets of the human mind, is too often looked upon with jealous eyes by the world, which is no great conjurer; he who pours out his intellectual wealth into the lap of the public is hated by those who cannot understand how he came by it; he who thinks beyond his age, cannot expect the feelings of his contemporaries to go along with him; he whose mind is of no age or country, is seldom properly recognized during his lifetime, and must wait, in order to have justice done him, for the late but lasting award of posterity:—"Where his treasure is, there his heart is also."

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LECTURE VII.

On the Works of Hogarth: On the grand and familiar style of Painting.

If the quantity of amusement, or of matter for more serious reflection which their works have afforded, is that by which we are to judge of precedence among the intellectual benefactors of mankind, there are, perhaps, few persons who can put in a stronger claim to our gratitude than Hogarth. It is not hazarding too much to assert, that he was one of the greatest comic geniuses that ever lived, and he was certainly one of the most extraordinary men this country has produced. Criticism has not done him justice, though public opinion has. His works have received a sanction which it would be vain to dispute, in the universal delight and admiration with which they have been regarded, from their first appearance to the present moment. The wonderful knowledge which he possessed of human life and manners, is only to be surpassed (if it can be) by the power of invention with which he has combined and contrasted his materials in the most ludicrous and varied points of view, and by the mastery of execution with which he has embodied and made tangible the very thoughts and passing movements of the mind. Critics sometimes object to the style of Hogarth's pictures, or to the class to which they belong. First, he belongs to no class, or if he does, it is to the same classes as Fielding, Smollett, Vanbrugh, and Moliere. Besides, the merit of his pictures does not depend on the nature of the subject, but on the knowledge displayed of it, on the number of ideas they excite, on the fund of thought and observation contained in them. They are to be studied as works of science as well as of amusement; they satisfy our love of truth; they fill up the void in the mind; they form a series of plates in natural history, and of that most interesting part of natural history, the history of our own

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species. Make what deductions you please for the vulgarity of the subject, yet in the research, the profundity, the absolute truth and precision of the delineation of character; in the invention of incident, in wit and humour; in the life with which they are "instinct in every part;" in everlasting variety and originality; they never have, and probably never will be surpassed. They stimulate the faculties as well as soothe them. "Other pictures we see, Hogarth's we read."

The public had not long ago an opportunity of viewing most of Hogarth's pictures, in the collection made of them at the British Gallery. The superiority of the original paintings to the common prints, is in a great measure confined to the 'Marriage a-la-Mode,' with which I shall begin my remarks.

Boccaccio, the most refined and sentimental of all the novel-writers, has been stigmatized as the mere inventor of licentious tales, because readers in general have only seized on those things in his works which were suited to their own taste, and have thus reflected their own grossness back upon the writer. So it has happened, that the majority of critics having been most struck with the strong and decided expression in Hogarth, the extreme delicacy and subtle gradations of character in his pictures, have almost entirely escaped them. In the first picture of the 'Marriage a-la-Mode,' the three figures of the young nobleman, his intended bride, and her inamorato, the lawyer, show how much Hogarth excelled in the power of giving soft and effeminate expression. They have, however, been less noticed than the other figures, which tell a plainer story, and convey a more palpable moral. Nothing can be more finely managed than the difference of character in these delicate personages. The beau sits smiling at the looking-glass, with a reflected simper of self-admiration, and a languishing inclination of the head, while the rest of his body is perked up on his high heels, with a certain air of tip-toe elevation. He is the Narcissus of the reign of George II., whose powdered peruke, ruffles, gold lace, and patches, divide his self-love equally with his own person, the true Sir Plume of his day,—

> "—— Of amber snuff-box justly vain,
> And the nice conduct of a clouded cane."

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There is the same felicity in the figure and attitude of the bride, courted by the lawyer. There is the utmost flexibility, and yielding softness in her whole person, a listless languor and tremulous suspense in the expression of her face. It is the precise look and air which Pope has given to his favourite Belinda, just at the moment of the 'Rape of the Lock.' The heightened glow, the forward intelligence, and loosened soul of love in the same face, in the Assignation-scene before the masquerade, form a fine and instructive contrast to the delicacy, timidity, and coy reluctance expressed in the first. The lawyer, in both pictures, is much the same—perhaps too much so—though even this unmoved, unaltered appearance may be designed as characteristic. In both cases, he has "a person and a smooth dispose, framed to make women false." He is full of that easy good-humour, and easy good opinion of himself, with which the sex are delighted. There is not a sharp angle in his face to obstruct his success, or give a hint of doubt or difficulty. His whole aspect is round and rosy, lively and unmeaning, happy without the least expense of thought, careless, and inviting; and conveys a perfect idea of the uninterrupted glide and pleasing murmur of the soft periods that flow from his tongue.

The expression of the bride in the Morning-scene is the most highly seasoned, and at the same time the most vulgar in the series. The figure, face, and attitude of the husband are inimitable. Hogarth has with great skill contrasted the pale countenance of the husband with the yellow whitish colour of the marble chimney-piece behind him, in such a manner as to preserve the fleshy tone of the former. The airy splendour of the view of the inner room in this picture, is probably not exceeded by any of the productions of the Flemish school.

The Young Girl, in the third picture, who is represented as a victim of fashionable profligacy, is unquestionably one of the artist's *chefs-d'œuvre*. The exquisite delicacy of the painting is only surpassed by the felicity and subtlety of the conception. Nothing can be more striking than the contrast between the extreme softness of her person and the hardened indifference of her character. The vacant stillness, the docility to vice, the premature suppression of youthful sensibility, the doll-like mechanism

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of the whole figure, which seems to have no other feeling but a sickly sense of pain,—show the deepest insight into human nature, and into the effects of those refinements in depravity, by which it has been good-naturedly-asserted, that "vice loses half its evil in losing all its grossness." The story of this picture is in some parts very obscure and enigmatical. It is certain that the Nobleman is not looking straight-forward to the Quack, whom he seems to have been threatening with his cane; but that his eyes are turned up with an ironical leer of triumph to the Procuress. The commanding attitude and size of this woman,—the swelling circumference of her dress, spread out like a turkey-cock's feathers,—the fierce, ungovernable, inveterate malignity of her countenance, which hardly needs the comment of the clasp-knife to explain her purpose, are all admirable in themselves, and still more so, as they are opposed to the mute insensibility, the elegant negligence of dress, and the childish figure of the girl, who is supposed to be her *protegèe*. As for the Quack, there can be no doubt entertained about him. His face seems as if it were composed of salve, and his features exhibit all the chaos and confusion of the most gross, ignorant, and impudent empiricism.

The gradations of ridiculous affectation in the Music-scene, are finely imagined and preserved. The preposterous, overstrained admiration of the Lady of Quality; the sentimental, insipid, patient delight of the Man with his hair in papers, and sipping his tea; the pert, smirking, conceited, half-distorted approbation of the figure next to him; the transition to the total insensibility of the round face in profile, and then to the wonder of the Negro-boy at the rapture of his mistress,—form a perfect whole. The sanguine complexion and flame-coloured hair of the female Virtuoso throw an additional light on the character. This is lost in the print. The continuing the red colour of the hair into the back of the chair, has been pointed out as one of those instances of alliteration in colouring, of which these pictures are every where full. The gross, bloated appearance of the Italian Singer is well relieved by the hard features of the instrumental Performer behind him, which might be carved of wood. The Negro-boy, holding the chocolate, in expression,

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colour, and execution, is a master piece. The gay, lively derision of the other Negro-boy, playing with the Actæon, is an ingenious contrast to the profound amazement of the first. Some account has already been given of the two lovers in this picture. It is curious to observe the infinite activity of mind which the artist displays on every occasion. An instance occurs in the present picture. He has so contrived the papers in the hair of the Bride, as to make them look almost like a wreath of half-blown flowers; while those which he has placed on the head of the musical Amateur very much resemble a *chevaux-de-frise* of horns, which adorn and fortify the lack-lustre expression and mild resignation of the face beneath.

The 'Night Scene' is inferior to the rest of the series. The attitude of the Husband, who is just killed, is one in which it would be impossible for him to stand, or even to fall. It resembles the loose pasteboard figures they make for children. The characters in the last picture, in which the wife dies, are all masterly. We would particularly refer to the captious, petulant self-sufficiency of the Apothecary, whose face and figure are constructed on exact physiognomical principles, and to the fine example of passive obedience, and non-resistance in the Servant, whom he is taking to task, and whose coat of green and yellow livery is as long and melancholy as his face. The disconsolate look, the haggard eyes, the open mouth, the comb sticking in the hair, the broken, gapped teeth, which, as it were, hitch in an answer—everything about him denotes the utmost perplexity and dismay. The harmony and gradations of colour in this picture are uniformly preserved with the greatest nicety, and are well worthy the attention of the artist.

We have so far attempted to point out the fund of observation, physical and moral, contained in one set of these pictures, the 'Marriage a-la-Mode.' The rest would furnish as many topics to descant upon, were the patience of the reader as inexhaustible as the painter's invention. But as this is not the case, we shall content ourselves with barely referring to some of those figures in the other pictures, which appear the most striking; and which we see, not only while we are looking at them, but which we have before us at all other times. For in-

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stance: who, having seen, can easily forget that exquisite frost-piece of religion and morality, the antiquated prude, in the picture of 'Morning?' or that striking commentary on the "good old times," the little appendage of a foot-boy, who crawls, half-famished and half-frozen, behind her? The French man and woman, in the 'Noon,' are the perfection of flighty affectation and studied grimace; the amiable fraternization of the two old women saluting each other, is not enough to be admired; and in the little master, in the same national group, we see the early promise and personification of that eternal principle of wondrous self-complacency proof against all circumstances, which makes the French the only people who are vain, even of being cuckolded and being conquered! Or shall we prefer to this, the outrageous distress and unmitigated terrors of the boy who has dropped his dish of meat, and who seems red all over with shame and vexation, and bursting with the noise he makes? Or what can be better than the good housewifery of the girl underneath, who is devouring the lucky fragments? Or than the plump, ripe, florid, luscious look of the servant-wench, embraced by a greasy rascal of an Othello, with her pye-dish tottering like her virtue, and with the most precious part of its contents running over? Just—no, not quite—as good, is the joke of the woman over head, who, having quarrelled with her husband, is throwing their Sunday's dinner out of the window, to complete this chapter of accidents of baked dishes. The husband, in the 'Evening Scene,' is certainly as meek as any recorded in history; but we cannot say that we admire this picture, or the 'Night Scene' after it. But then, in the 'Taste in High Life,' there is that inimitable pair, differing only in sex, congratulating and delighting one another by "all the mutually reflected charities" of folly and affectation; with the young lady, coloured like a rose, dandling her little, black, pug-faced, white-teethed, chuckling favourite; and with the portrait of M. Des Noyers, in the back ground, dancing in a grand ballet, surrounded by butterflies. And again, in 'The Election Dinner,' is the immortal cobbler, surrounded by his peers, who, "frequent and full,"—

"In loud recess and brawling conclave sit!"

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the Jew, in the second picture, a very Jew in grain—innumerable fine sketches of heads in the 'Polling for Votes,' of which the nobleman, overlooking the caricaturist, is the best;—and then the irresistible, tumultuous display of broad humour in the 'Chairing the Member,' which is, perhaps, of all Hogarth's pictures, the most full of laughable incidents and situations. The yellow, rusty-faced thresher, with his swinging flail, breaking the head of one of the chairmen; and his redoubted antagonist, the sailor, with his oak stick, and stumping wooden leg, a supplemental cudgel—the persevering ecstasy of the hobbling blind fiddler, who, in the fray, appears to have been trod upon by the artificial excrescence of the honest tar—Monsieur, the monkey, with piteous aspect, speculating the impending disaster of the triumphant candidate; and his brother Bruin, appropriating the paunch—the precipitous flight of the pigs, souse over head into the water; the fine lady fainting, with vermilion lips; and the two chimney-sweepers, satirical young rogues!—I had almost forgot the politician, who is burning a hole through his hat with a candle in reading a newspaper; and the chickens, in the 'March to Finchley,' wandering in search of their lost dam, who is found in the pocket of the Serjeant. Of the pictures in the 'Rake's Progress,' exhibited in this collection, I shall not here say anything, because I think them, on the whole, inferior to the prints, and because they have already been criticised by a writer, to whom I could add nothing, in a paper which ought to be read by every lover of Hogarth and of English genius—I mean, 'Mr. Lamb's Essay on the works of Hogarth.' I shall at present proceed to form some estimate of the style of art in which this painter excelled.

What distinguishes his compositions from all others of the same general kind, is, that they are equally remote from caricature and from mere still life. It of course happens in subjects taken from common life, that the painter can procure real models, and he can get them to sit as long as he pleases. Hence, in general, those attitudes and expressions have been chosen which could be assumed the longest; and in imitating which, the artist, by taking pains and time, might produce almost as complete *fac-similes* as he could of a flower or a flower-pot, of a

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damask curtain or a china vase. The copy was as perfect and as uninteresting in the one case as in the other. On the contrary, subjects of drollery and ridicule, affording frequent examples of strange deformity and peculiarity of features, these have been eagerly seized by another class of artists, who, without subjecting themselves to the laborious drudgery of the Dutch school and their imitators, have produced our popular caricatures, by rudely copying or exaggerating the casual irregularities of the human countenance. Hogarth has equally avoided the faults of both these styles; the insipid tameness of the one, and the gross extravagance of the other, so as to give to the productions of his pencil equal solidity and effect. For his faces go to the very verge of caricature, and yet never (I believe in any single instance) go beyond it: they take the very widest latitude, and yet we always see the links which bind them to nature: they bear all the marks, and carry all the conviction of reality with them, as if we had seen the actual faces for the first time, from the precision, consistency, and good sense with which the whole and every part is made out. They exhibit the most uncommon features, with the most uncommon expressions; but which yet are as familiar and intelligible as possible, because, with all the boldness, they have all the truth of nature. Hogarth has left behind him as many of these memorable faces, in their memorable moments, as, perhaps, most of us remember in the course of our lives, and has thus doubled the quantity of our experience.

It will assist us in forming a more determinate idea of the peculiar genius of Hogarth, to compare him with a deservedly admired artist in our own times. The highest authority on art in this country, I understand, has pronounced that Mr. Wilkie united the excellencies of Hogarth to those of Teniers. I demur to this decision in both its branches: but in demurring to authority it is necessary to give our reasons. I conceive that this ingenious and attentive observer of nature has certain essential, real, and indisputable excellencies of his own; and I think it, therefore, the less important to clothe him with any vicarious merits which do not belong to him. Mr. Wilkie's pictures, generally speaking, derive almost their whole value from their

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reality, or the truth of the representation. They are works of pure imitative art; and the test of this style of composition is to represent nature faithfully and happily in its simplest combinations. It may be said of an artist like Mr. Wilkie, that nothing human is indifferent to him. His mind takes an interest in, and it gives an interest to, the most familiar scenes and transactions of life. He professedly gives character, thought, and passion, in their lowest degrees, and in their every-day forms. He selects the commonest events and appearances of nature for his subjects; and trusts to their very commonness for the interest and amusement he is to excite. Mr. Wilkie is a serious, prosaic, literal narrator of facts; and his pictures may be considered as diaries, or minutes of what is passing constantly about us. Hogarth, on the contrary, is essentially a comic painter; his pictures are not indifferent, unimpassioned, transcripts of incidental scenes or customs, or descriptions of human nature, but rich, exuberant moral satires, exposing vice and folly in their most ludicrous points of view, and, with a profound insight into the weak sides of character and manners in all their tendences, combinations, and contrasts. There is not a single picture of his containing a representation of merely natural or domestic scenery. He is carried away by a passion for the *ridiculous*. His object is not so much "to hold the mirror up to nature" as "to show vice her own feature, scorn her own image." He is so far from contenting himself with still-life that he is always on the verge of caricature, though without ever falling into it. He does not represent folly or vice in its incipient, or dormant, or *grub* state; but full-grown, with wings, pampered into all sorts of affectation, airy, ostentatious, and extravagant. Folly is there seen at the height—the moon is at the full; it is "the very error of the time." There is a perpetual collision of eccentricities—a tilt and tournament of absurdities; the prejudices and caprices of mankind are let loose, and set together by the ears, as in a bear-garden. Hogarth paints nothing but comedy or tragi-comedy. Wilkie paints neither one nor the other. Hogarth never looks at any object but to find out a moral or a ludicrous effect. Wilkie never looks at any object but to see that it is there. Hogarth's pictures are a perfect jest-book from one end to the other.

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I do not remember a single joke in Wilkie's, except one very bad one of the boy in the 'Blind Fiddler,' scraping the grid-iron, or fire-shovel, I forget which it is.* In looking at Hogarth, you are ready to burst your sides with laughing at the unaccountable jumble of odd things which are brought together; you look at Wilkie's pictures with a mingled feeling of curiosity and admiration at the accuracy of the representation. For instance, there is a most admirable head of a man coughing in the 'Rent Day;' the action, the keeping, the choked sensation, are inimitable; but there is nothing to laugh at in a man coughing. What strikes the mind is the difficulty of a man's being painted coughing, which here certainly is a masterpiece of art. But turn to the blackguard cobbler in the 'Election Dinner,' who has been smutting his neighbour's face over, and who is lolling out his tongue at the joke, with a most surprising obliquity of vision, and immediately "your lungs begin to crow like chanticleer." Again, there is the little boy crying in the 'Cut Finger,' who only gives you the idea of a cross, disagreeable, obstinate child in pain; whereas the same face in Hogarth's 'Noon,' from the ridiculous perplexity it is in, and its extravagant, noisy, unfelt distress, at the accident of having let fall the pye-dish, is quite irresistible. Mr. Wilkie, in his picture of the 'Ale-house Door,' I believe, painted Mr. Liston as one of the figures without any great effect. Hogarth would have given any price for such a subject, and would have made it worth any money. I have never seen anything in the expression of comic humour equal to Hogarth's pictures but Liston's face!

Mr. Wilkie paints interiors, but still you generally connect them with the country. Hogarth, even when he paints people in the open air, represents them either as coming from London, as in the polling for votes at Brentford, or as returning to it, as the dyer and his wife at Bagnigge Wells. In this last picture he has contrived to convert a common rural image into a type and emblem of city honours. In fact, I know no one who had a less pastoral imagination than Hogarth. He delights in the

* The waiter drawing the cork, in the 'Rent-day,' is another exception, and quite Hogarthian.

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thick of St. Giles's or St. James's. His pictures breathe a certain close, greasy, tavern air. The fare he serves up to us consists of high-seasoned dishes, ragouts, and olla podridas, like the supper in 'Gil Blas,' which it requires a strong stomach to digest. Mr. Wilkie presents us with a sort of lenten fare, very good and wholesome, but rather insipid than overpowering! Mr. Wilkie's pictures are, in general, much better painted than Hogarth's; but the 'Marriage-a-la-Mode' is superior both in colour and execution to any of Wilkie's. I may add here, without any disparagement, that, as an artist, Mr. Wilkie is hardly to be mentioned with Teniers. Neither in truth and brilliant clearness of colouring, nor in facility of execution, is there any comparison. Teniers was a perfect master in all these respects, and our own countryman is positively defective, notwithstanding the very laudable care with which he finishes every part of his pictures. There is an evident smear and dragging of the paint, which is also of a bad purple or puttyish tone, and which never appears in the pictures of the Flemish artist, any more than in a looking-glass. Teniers, probably from his facility of execution, succeeded in giving a more local and momentary expression to his figures. They seem each going on with his particular amusement or occupation; Wilkie's have, in general, more a look of sitting for their pictures. Their compositions are very different also; and in this respect, I believe, Mr. Wilkie has the advantage. Teniers's boors are usually amusing themselves at skittles, or dancing, or drinking, or smoking, or doing what they like, in a careless, desultory way; and so the composition is loose and irregular. Wilkie's figures are all drawn up in a regular order, and engaged in one principal action, with occasional episodes. The story of the 'Blind Fiddler' is the most interesting and the best told. The two children standing before the musician are delightful. The 'Card-players' is the best coloured of his pictures, if I am not mistaken. The 'Village Politicians,' though excellent as to character and composition, is inferior as a picture to those which Mr. Wilkie has since painted. His latest pictures, however, do not appear to me to be his best. There is something of manner and affectation in the grouping of the figures, and a pink and rosy colour spread

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over them, which is out of place. The hues of Rubens and Sir Joshua do not agree with Mr. Wilkie's subjects. One of his last pictures, that of 'Duncan Gray,' is equally remarkable for sweetness and simplicity in colour, composition, and expression. I must here conclude this very general account; for to point out the particular beauties of every one of his pictures in detail, would require an Essay by itself.

I have promised to say something in this Lecture on the difference between the grand and familiar style of painting; and I shall throw out what imperfect hints I have been able to collect on this subject, so often attempted and never yet succeeded in, taking the examples and illustrations from Hogarth, that is, from what he possessed or wanted in each kind.

And first, the difference is not that between imitation and invention; for there is as much of this last quality in Hogarth as in any painter or poet whatever. As for example, to take two of his pictures only, I mean the 'Enraged Musician' and the 'Gin Lane;' in one of which every conceivable variety of disagreeable and discordant sound—the razor-grinder turning his wheel; the boy with his drum, and the girl with her rattle momentarily suspended; the pursuivant blowing his horn; the shrill milk-woman; the inexorable ballad-singers with her squalling infant; the pewterer's shop close by; the fish-women; the chimney-sweepers at the top of a chimney, and the two cats in melodious concert on the ridge of the tiles; with the bells ringing in the distance, as we see by the flags flying;—and in the other, the complicated forms and signs of death and ruinous decay—the woman on the stairs of the bridge asleep, letting her child fall over; her ghastly companion opposite, next to death's door, with hollow, famished cheeks and staring ribs; the dog fighting with the man for the bare shin-bone; the man hanging himself in a garret; the female corpse put into a coffin by the parish beadle; the men marching after a funeral, seen through a broken wall in the back ground; and the very houses reeling as if drunk and tumbling about the ears of the infatuated victims below, the pawnbroker's being the only one that stands firm and unimpaired—enforce the moral meant to be conveyed by each of these pieces with a richness and re-

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search of combination and artful contrast not easily paralleled in any production of the pencil or the pen. The clock pointing to four in the morning, in 'Modern Midnight Conversation,' just as the immoveable Parson Ford is filling out another glass from a brimming punch-bowl, while most of his companions, with the exception of the sly lawyer, are falling around him "like leaves in October;" and again, the extraordinary mistake of the man leaning against the post, in the 'Lord Mayor's Procession'—show a mind capable of seizing the most rare and transient coincidences of things, of imagining what either never happened at all, or of instantly fixing on and applying to its purpose what never happened but once. So far, the invention shown in the great style of painting is poor in the comparison. Indeed, grandeur is supposed (whether rightly or not, I shall not here inquire) to imply a simplicity inconsistent with this inexhaustible variety of incident and circumstantial detail.

Secondly, the difference between the ideal and familiar style is not to be explained by the difference between the genteel and vulgar; for it is evident that Hogarth was almost as much at home in the genteel comedy as in the broad farce of his pictures. He excelled not only in exhibiting the coarse humours and disgusting incidents of the lowest life, but in exhibiting the vices, the follies, and the frivolity of the fashionable manners of his time: his fine ladies do not yield the palm of ridicule to his waiting-maids, and his lords and his footmen are on a very respectable footing of equality. There is no want, for example, in the 'Marriage-a-la-Mode,' or in 'Taste in High Life,' of affectation verging into idiocy, or of languid sensibility that might—

"Die of a rose in aromatic pain."

Many of Hogarth's characters would form admirable illustrations of Pope's Satires, who was contemporary with him. In short, Hogarth was a painter, not of low but of real life; and the ridiculous and prominent features of high or low life, "of the great vulgar or the small," lay equally open to him. The country girl, in the first plate of the 'Harlot's Progress,' coming out of the wagon, is not more simple and ungainly than the

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same figure, in the second, is thoroughly initiated into the mysteries of her art, and suddenly accomplished in all the airs and graces of affectation, ease, and impudence. The affected languor and imbecility of the same girl afterwards, when put to beat hemp in Bridewell, is exactly in keeping with the character she has been taught to assume. Sir Joshua could do nothing like it in his line of portrait, which differed chiefly in the back ground. The fine gentleman at his levee, in the 'Rake's Progress,' is also a complete model of a person of rank and fortune, surrounded by needy and worthless adventurers, fiddlers, poetasters and virtuosi, as was the custom in those days. Lord Chesterfield himself would not have been disgraced by sitting for it. I might multiply examples to show that Hogarth was not characteristically deficient in that kind of elegance which arises from an habitual attention to external appearance and deportment. I will only add as instances, among his women, the two *elégantes* in the 'Bedlam Scene,' who are dressed (allowing for the difference of not quite a century) "in the manner of Ackerman's fashions for May;" and among the men, the lawyer in 'Modern Midnight Conversation,' whose gracious significant leer and sleek lubricated countenance exhibit all the happy finesse of his profession, when a silk gown has been added, or is likely to be added to it; and several figures in the Cockpit, who are evidently, at the first glance, gentlemen of the old school, and where the mixture of the blacklegs with the higher character is a still further test of the discriminating skill of the painter.

Again, Hogarth had not only a perception of fashion, but a sense of natural beauty. There are as many pleasing faces in his pictures as in Sir Joshua. Witness the girl picking the rake's pocket in the 'Bagnio' scene, whom we might suppose to be "the charming Betsy Careless;" the poet's wife, handsomer than falls to the lot of most poets, who are generally more intent upon the idea in their own minds than on the image before them, and are glad to take up with dulcineas of their own creating; the theatrical heroine in the 'Southwark Fair,' who would be an accession to either of our play-houses; the girl asleep ogled by the clerk in church-time, and the sweetheart of

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the 'Good Apprentice' in the reading desk, in the second of that series, almost an ideal face and expression; the girl in her cap selected for a partner by the footman in the print of 'Morning,' very handsome; and many others equally so, scattered like "stray-gifts of love and beauty" through these pictures. Hogarth was not then exclusively the painter of deformity. He painted beauty or ugliness indifferently, as they came in his way; and was not by nature confined to those faces which are painful and disgusting, as many would have us believe.

Again, neither are we to look for the solution of the difficulty in the difference between the comic and the tragic, between loose laughter and deep passion. For Mr. Lamb has shown unanswerably that Hogarth is quite at home in scenes of the deepest distress, in the heart-rending calamities of common life, in the expression of ungovernable rage, silent despair, or moody madness, enhanced by the tenderest sympathy, or aggravated by the frightful contrast of the most impenetrable and obdurate insensibility, as we see strikingly exemplified in the latter prints of the 'Rake's Progress.' To the unbeliever in Hogarth's power over the passions and the feelings of the heart, the characters there speak like "the hand-writing on the wall." If Mr. Lamb has gone too far in paralleling some of these appalling representations with Shakspeare, he was excusable in being led to set off what may be considered as a staggering paradox against a rooted prejudice. At any rate the inferiority of Hogarth (be it what it may) did not arise from a want of passion and intense feeling; and in this respect he had the advantage over Fielding, for instance, and others of our comic writers, who excelled only in the light and ridiculous. There is in general a distinction, almost an impassable one, between the power of embodying the serious and the ludicrous; but these contradictory faculties were reconciled in Hogarth, as they were in Shakspeare, in Chaucer, and as it is said that they were in another extraordinary and later instance, Garrick's acting.

None of these, then, will do: neither will the most masterly and entire keeping of character lead us to an explanation of the grand and ideal style; for Hogarth possessed the most complete and absolute mastery over the truth and identity of expression

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and features in his subjects. Every stroke of his pencil tells according to a preconception in his mind. If the eye squints, the mouth is distorted; every feature acts and is acted upon by the rest of the face; even the dress and attitude are such as could be proper to no other figure: the whole is under the influence of one impulse, that of truth and nature. Look at the heads in the Cockpit already mentioned, one of the most masterly of his productions in this way, where the workings of the mind are seen in every muscle of every face; and the same expression, more intense or relaxed, of hope or of fear, is stamped on each of the characters, so that you could no more transpose any part of one countenance to another, than you could change a profile to a front face. Hogarth was, in one sense, strictly an historical painter: that is, he represented the manners and humours of mankind in action, and their characters by varied expression. Everything in his pictures has life and motion in it. Not only does the business of the scene never stand still, but every feature is put into full play; the exact feeling of the moment is brought out, and carried to its utmost height, and then instantly seized and stamped on the canvass for ever. The expression is always taken *en passant*, in a state of progress or change, and, as it were, at the salient point. Besides the excellence of each individual face, the reflection of the expression from face to face, the contrast and struggle of particular motives and feelings in the different actors in the scene, as of anger, contempt, laughter, compassion, are conveyed in the happiest and most lively manner. His figures are not like the back-ground on which they are painted: even the pictures on the wall have a peculiar look of their own. All this is effected by a few decisive and rapid touches of the pencil, careless in appearance, but infallible in their results; so that one great criterion of the grand style insisted on by Sir Joshua Reynolds, that of leaving out the details, and attending to general character and outline, belonged to Hogarth. He did not, indeed, arrive at middle forms or neutral expression, which Sir Joshua makes another test of the ideal; for Hogarth was not insipid. That was the last fault with which he could be charged. But he had breadth

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and boldness of manner, as well as any of them; so that neither does that constitute the ideal.

What then does? We have reduced this to something like the last remaining quantity in an equation, where all the others have been ascertained. Hogarth had all the other parts of an original and accomplished genius except this; but this he had not. He had an intense feeling and command over the impressions of sense, of habit, of character, and passion, the serious and the comic, in a word, of nature, as it fell within his own observation, or came within the sphere of his actual experience; but he had little power beyond that sphere, or sympathy with that which existed only in idea. He was "conformed to this world, not transformed." If he attempted to paint Pharaoh's daughter, and Paul before Felix, he lost himself. His mind had feet and hands, but not wings to fly with. There is a mighty world of sense, of custom, of every-day action, of accidents and objects coming home to us, and interesting because they do so; the gross, material, stirring, noisy world of common life and selfish passion, of which Hogarth was absolute lord and master: there is another mightier world, that which exists only in conception and in power, the universe of thought and sentiment, that surrounds and is raised above the ordinary world of reality, as the empyrean surrounds this nether globe, into which few are privileged to soar with mighty wings outspread, and in which, as power is given them to embody their aspiring fancies, to "give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name," to fill with imaginary shapes of beauty or sublimity, and make the dark abyss pregnant, bringing that which is remote home to us, raising themselves to the lofty, sustaining themselves on the refined and abstracted, making all things like not what we know and feel in ourselves, in this "ignorant present" time, but like what they must be in themselves, or in our noblest idea of them, and stamping that idea with reality, (but chiefly clothing the best and the highest with grace and grandeur:) this is the ideal in art, in poetry, and in painting. There are things which are cognizable only to sense, which interest only our more immediate instincts and passions; the want of food, the loss of a limb, or of a sum of money: there are others that appeal to different and

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nobler faculties; the wants of the mind, the hunger and thirst after truth and beauty; that is, to faculties commensurate with objects greater and of greater refinement, which to be grand must extend beyond ourselves to others, and our interest in which must be refined in proportion as they do so.* The interest in these subjects is in proportion to the power of conceiving them, and the power of conceiving them is in proportion to the interest and affection for them, to the innate bias of the mind to elevate itself above everything low, and purify itself from everything gross. Hogarth only transcribes or transposes what was tangible and visible, not the abstracted and intelligible. You see in his pictures only the faces which you yourself have seen, or others like them; none of his characters are thinking of any person or thing out of the picture; you are only interested in the objects of their contention or pursuit, because they themselves are interested in them. There is nothing remote in thought, or comprehensive in feeling. The whole is intensely personal and local, but the interest of the ideal and poetical style of art, relates to more permanent and universal objects; and the characters and forms must be such as to correspond with and sustain that interest, and give external grace and dignity to it. Such were the subjects which Raphael chose; faces imbued with unalterable sentiment, and figures that stand in the eternal silence of thought. He places before you objects of everlasting interest, events of greatest magnitude, and persons in them fit for the scene of action—warriors and kings, princes and nobles, and greater yet, poets and philosophers, and mightier than these, patriarchs and apostles, prophets and founders of religion, saints and martyrs, angels and the Son of God. We know their importance and their high calling, and we feel that they do not belie it. We see them as they were painted, with the eye of faith. The light which they have kindled in the world is reflected back upon their faces; the

* When Meg Merrilies says in her dying moments—"Nay, nay, lay my head to the east," what was the east to her? Not a reality, but an idea of distant time and the land of her forefathers; the last, the strongest, and the best that occurred to her in this world. Her gipsy slang and dress were quaint and grotesque; her attachment to the Kaim of Dernclough and the wood of Warrock was romantic; her worship of the east was ideal.

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awe and homage which has been paid to them is seated upon their brow, and encircles them like a glory. All those who come before them are conscious of a superior presence. For example, the beggars in the Gate Beautiful are impressed with this ideal borrowed character. Would not the cripple and the halt feel a difference of sensation, and express it outwardly in such circumstances? And was the painter wrong to transfer this sense of preternatural power and the confidence of a saving faith to his canvass? Hogarth's 'Pool of Bethesda,' on the contrary, is only a collection of common beggars receiving an alms. The waters may be stirred, but the mind is not stirred with them. The fowls, again, in the 'Miraculous Draught of Fishes,' exult and clap their wings, and seem lifted up with some unusual cause of joy. There is not the same expansive, elevated principle in Hogarth. He has amiable and praise-worthy characters, indeed, among his bad ones. The master of the industrious and idle apprentice is a good citizen and a virtuous man; but his benevolence is mechanical and confined; it extends only to his shop, or, at most, to his ward. His face is not ruffled by passion, nor is it inspired by thought. To give another instance, the face of the faithful female fainting in the prison scene in the 'Rake's Progress,' is more one of effeminate softness than of disinterested tenderness, or heroic constancy. But in the pictures of the 'Mother and Child,' by Raphael and Leonardo Da Vinci, we see all the tenderness purified from all the weakness of maternal affection, and exalted by the prospects of religious faith; so that the piety and devotion of future generations seems to add its weight to the expression of feminine sweetness and parental love, to press upon the heart, and breathe in the countenance. This is the ideal, passion blended with thought and pointing to distant objects, not debased by grossness, not thwarted by accident, not weakened by familiarity, but connected with forms and circumstances that give the utmost possible expansion and refinement to the general sentiment. With all my admiration of Hogarth, I cannot think him equal to Raphael. I do not know whether if the portfolio were opened, I would not as soon look over the prints of Hogarth as those of Raphael; but assuredly, if the question were put to me, I would sooner never have

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seen the prints of Hogarth than never have seen those of Raphael. It is many years ago since I first saw the prints of the 'Cartoons' hanging round the old-fashioned parlour of a little inn in a remote part of the country. I was then young: I had heard of the fame of the 'Cartoons,' but this was the first time I had ever been admitted face to face into the presence of those divine works. "How was I then uplifted!" Prophets and apostles stood before me as in a dream, and the Saviour of the Christian world with his attributes of faith and power; miracles were working on the walls; the hand of Raphael was there; and as his pencil traced the lines, I saw godlike spirits and lofty shapes descend and walk visibly the earth, but as if their thoughts still lifted them above the earth. There I saw the figure of St. Paul, pointing with noble fervour to "temples not made with hands, eternal in the heavens;" and that finer one of Christ in the boat, whose whole figure seems sustained by meekness and love; and that of the same person surrounded by his disciples, like a flock of sheep listening to the music of some divine shepherd. I knew not how enough to admire them. If from this transport and delight there arose in my breast a wish, a deep aspiration of mingled hope and fear to be able one day to do something like them, that hope has long since vanished; but not with it the love of art, nor delight in the works of art, nor admiration of the genius which produces them, nor respect for fame which rewards and crowns them! Later in life, I saw other works of this great painter (with more like them) collected in the Louvre, where Art at that time lifted up her head, and was seated on her throne, and said, "All eyes shall see me, and all knees shall bow to me!" Honour was done to her and all hers. There was her treasure, and there the inventory of all she had. There she had gathered together her pomp, and there was her shrine, and there her votaries came and worshipped as in a temple. The crown she wore was brighter than that of kings. Where the struggles for human liberty had been there were the triumphs of human genius. For there, in the Louvre, were the precious monuments of art; there "stood the statue that enchants the world;" there was 'Apollo,' the 'Laocoon,' the 'Dying Gladiator,' the head of the 'Antinous,' 'Diana with her Fawn,' the

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'Muses and the Graces' in a ring, and all the glories of the antique world:—

> "There was old Proteus coming from the sea,
> And wreathed Triton blew his winding horn."

There, too, were the two 'St. Jeromes,' Corregio's and Domenichino's; there was Raphael's 'Transfiguration,' the 'St. Mark of Tintoret, Paul Veronese's 'Marriage of Cana,' the 'Deluge' of Poussin, and Titian's 'St. Peter Martyr.' It was there that I learned to become an enthusiast of the lasting works of the great painters, and of their names no less magnificent: grateful to the heart as the sound of celestial harmony from other spheres, waking around us (whether heard or not) from youth to age; the stay, the guide and anchor of our purest thoughts; whom, having once seen, we always remember, and who teach us to see all things through them; without whom life would be to begin again, and the earth barren; of Raphael, who lifted the human form half-way to Heaven; of Titian, who painted the mind in the face, and unfolded the soul of things to the eye; of Rubens, around whose pencil gorgeous shapes thronged numberless, startling us by the novel accidents of form and colour, putting the spirit of motion into the universe, and weaving a gay fantastic round and bacchanalian dance with nature; of Rembrandt, too, who "smoothed the raven down of darkness till it smiled," and tinged it with a light like streaks of burnished ore; of these, and more than these, of whom the world was scarce worthy, and for the loss of whom nothing could console me—not even the works of Hogarth!

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LECTURE VIII.

On the Comic Writers of the Last Century.

THE question which has been often asked, "Why there are comparatively so few good modern comedies?" appears in a great measure to answer itself. It is because so many excellent comedies have been written, that there are none written at present. Comedy naturally wears itself out—destroys the very food on which it lives; and by constantly and successfully exposing the follies and weaknesses of mankind to ridicule, in the end leaves itself nothing worth laughing at. It holds the mirror up to nature, and men seeing their most striking peculiarities and defects, pass in gay review before them, learn either to avoid or conceal them. It is not the criticism which the public taste exercises upon the stage, but the criticism which the stage exercises upon public manners that is fatal to comedy, by rendering the subject-matter of it tame, correct, and spiritless. We are drilled into a sort of stupid decorum, and forced to wear the same dull uniform of outward appearance; and yet it is asked, why the Comic Muse does not point, as she was wont, at the peculiarities of our gait and gesture, and exhibit the picturesque contrasts of our dress and costume, in all that graceful variety in which she delights. The genuine source of comic writing,

"Where it must live, or have no life at all,"

is undoubtedly to be found in the distinguishing peculiarities of men and manners. Now this distinction can subsist, so as to be strong, pointed, and general, only while the manners of different classes are formed almost immediately by their particular circumstances, and the characters of individuals by their natural temperament and situation, without being everlastingly modified and neutralized by intercourse with the world—by knowledge

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and education. In a certain stage of society, men may be said to vegetate like trees, and to become rooted to the soil in which they grow. They have no idea of anything beyond themselves and their immediate sphere of action; they are, as it were, circumscribed, and defined by their particular circumstances; they are what their situation makes them, and nothing more. Each is absorbed in his own profession or pursuit, and each in his turn contracts that habitual peculiarity of manners and opinions which makes him the subject of ridicule to others, and the sport of the Comic Muse. Thus the physician is nothing but a physician, the lawyer is a mere lawyer, the scholar degenerates into a pedant, the country squire is a different species of being from the fine gentleman, the citizen and the courtier inhabit each a different world, and even the affectation of certain characters, in aping the follies or vices of their betters, only serves to show the immeasurable distance which custom or fortune has placed between them. Hence the earlier comic writers, taking advantage of this mixed and solid mass of ignorance, folly, pride, and prejudice, made those deep and lasting incisions into it,—have given those sharp and nice touches, that bold relief to their characters,—have opposed them in every variety of contrast and collision, of conscious self-satisfaction and mutual antipathy, with a power which can only find full scope in the same rich and inexhaustible materials. But in proportion as comic genius succeeds in taking off the mask from ignorance and conceit, as it teaches us

"To see ourselves as others see us,"—

in proportion as we are brought out on the stage together, and our prejudices clash one against the other, our sharp angular points wear off; we are no longer rigid in absurdity, passionate in folly, and we prevent the ridicule directed at our habitual foibles by laughing at them ourselves.

If it be said, that there is the same fund of absurdity and prejudice in the world as ever—that there are the same unaccountable perversities lurking at the bottom of every breast,—I should answer, Be it so: but at least we keep our follies to ourselves as much as possible; we palliate, shuffle, and equivo-

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cate with them; they sneak into bye-corners, and do not, like Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims, march along the high road, and form a procession; they do not entrench themselves strongly behind custom and precedent; they are not embodied in professions and ranks in life; they are not organized into a system; they do not openly resort to a standard, but are a sort of straggling nondescripts, that, like Wart, "present no mark to the foeman." As to the gross and palpable absurdities of modern manners, they are too shallow and barefaced, and those who affect are too little serious in them, to make them worth the detection of the Comic Muse. They proceed from an idle, impudent affectation of folly in general, in the dashing bravura style, not from an infatuation with any of its characteristic modes. In short, the proper object of ridicule is egotism: and a man cannot be a very great egotist, who every day sees himself represented on the stage. We are deficient in comedy, because we are without characters in real life—as we have no historical pictures, because we have no faces proper for them.

It is, indeed, the evident tendency of all literature to generalise and dissipate character, by giving men the same artificial education, and the same common stock of ideas; so that we see all objects from the same point of view, and through the same reflected medium;—we learn to exist, not in ourselves, but in books;—all men become alike mere readers—spectators, not actors in the scene, and lose their proper personal identity The templar, the wit, the man of pleasure, and the man of fashion, the courtier and the citizen, the knight and the squire, the lover and the miser—Lovelace, Lothario, Will Honeycomb, and Sir Roger de Coverley, Sparkish and Lord Foppington, Western and Tom Jones, My Father and My Uncle Toby, Millamant and Sir Sampson Legend, Don Quixote and Sancho, Gil Blas and Guzman d'Alfarache, Count Fathom and Joseph Surface,—have met and exchanged common-places on the barren plains of the *haute litérature*—toil slowly on to the temple of science, "seen a long way off upon a level," and end in one dull compound of politics, criticism, chemistry and metaphysics!

We cannot expect to reconcile opposite things. If, for exam-

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ple, any of us were to put ourselves into the stage-coach from Salisbury to London, it is more than probable we should not meet with the same number of odd accidents, or ludicrous distresses on the road, that befell Parson Adams; but why, if we get into a common vehicle, and submit to the conveniences of modern travelling, should we complain of the want of adventures? Modern manners may be compared to a modern stage-coach; our limbs may be a little cramped with the confinement, and we may grow drowsy, but we arrive safe, without any very amusing or very sad accident, at our journey's end.

In this theory I have, at least, the authority of Sterne and the 'Tatler' on my side, who attribute the greater variety and richness of comic excellence in our writers, to the greater variety and distinctness of character among ourselves; the roughness of the texture and the sharp angles not being worn out by the artificial refinements of intellect, or the frequent collision of social intercourse.—It has been argued on the other hand, indeed, that this circumstance makes against me; that the suppression of the grosser indications of absurdity ought to stimulate and give scope to the ingenuity and penetration of the comic writer who is to detect them; that the progress of wit and humour ought to keep pace with critical distinctions and metaphysical niceties; [that the more we are become like one another, or like nothing, the less distinction of character we have, the greater discrimination must it require to bring it out; that the less ridiculous our manners become, the more scope do they afford for art and ingenuity in discovering our weak sides and shades of infirmity, and that the greatest sameness and monotony, must in the end produce the most exquisite variety. What a pity it is, that so ingenious a theory should not have the facts on its side; and that the perfection of satire should not be found to keep pace with the want of materials. It is rather too much to assume on a mere hypothesis, that the present manners are equally favourable to the production of the highest comic excellence, till they do produce it. Even in France, where encouragement is given to the noblest and most successful exertions of genius by the sure prospect of profit to yourself or your descendants, every time your piece is acted in any

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corner of the empire,—we find the best critics going back to the grossness and illiberality of the age of Louis XIV. for the production of the best comedies; which is rather extraordinary, considering the infinitely refined state of manners in France, and the infinite encouragement given to dramatic talent. But there is a difference between refinement and imbecility, between general knowledge and personal elegance, between metaphysical subtlety and stage-effect. All manners, all kinds of folly, and all shades of character are not equally fit for dramatic representation. There is a point where minuteness of distinction becomes laborious foolery, and where the slenderness of the materials must baffle the skill and destroy the exertions of the artist. A critic of this sort will insist, indeed, on pulling off the mask of folly, by some ingenious device, though she has been stripped of it long ago, and forced to compose her features into a decent appearance of gravity; and apply a microscope of a new construction to detect the freckles on her face and inequalities in her skin, in order to communicate amusing discoveries to the audience, as some philosophical lecturer does the results of his chemical experiments on the decomposition of substances to the admiring circle. There is no end to this. His penetrating eye is infinitely delighted with the grotesque appearance of so many imperceptible deviations from a right line, and mathematical inclinations from the perpendicular. The picture of the 'Flamborough Family,' painted with each an orange in his hand, must have been a master-piece of nice discrimination and graceful inflection. Upon this principle of going to work the wrong way, and of making something out of nothing, we must reverse all our rules of taste and common sense. No comedy can be perfect till the *dramatis personæ* might be reversed without creating much confusion; or the ingredients of character ought to be so blended and poured repeatedly from one vessel into another, that the difference would be perceptible only to the finest palate. Thus, if Moliere had lived in the present day, he would not have drawn his 'Avare,' his 'Tartuffe,' and his Misanthrope with those strong touches and violent contrasts which he has done, but with those delicate traits which are common to human nature in general, that is,

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his Miser without avarice, his Hypocrite without design, and his Misanthrope without disgust at the vices of mankind:] these theorists, in short, have been sanguine enough to expect a regular advance from grossness to refinement in wit and pleasantry, on the stage and in real life, marked on a graduated scale of human perfectibility, and have been hence led to imagine that the best of our old comedies were no better than the coarse jests of a set of country clowns—a sort of *comedies bourgeoises*, compared with the admirable productions which might, but have not, been written in our times. I must protest against this theory altogether, which would go to degrade genteel comedy from a high court lady into a literary prostitute. I do not know what these persons mean by refinement in this instance. Do they find none in Millamant and her morning dreams, in Sir Roger de Coverley and his widow? Did not Etherege, Wycherley, Suckling, and Congreve, approach tolerably near

"——— the ring
Of mimic statesmen and their merry king?"

Is there no distinction between an Angelica and a Miss Prue, a Valentine, a Tattle, and a Ben? Where, in the annals of modern literature, shall we find anything more refined, more deliberate, more abstracted in vice than the nobleman in 'Amelia?' Are not the compliments which Pope paid to his friends, to Murray and to Cornbury, equal in taste and elegance to any which have been paid since? Are there no traits in Sterne? Is not Richardson minute enough? Must we part with Sophia Western and her muff, and Clarissa Harlowe's "preferable regards" for the loves of the plants and the triangles? Or shall we say that the Berinthias and Alitheas of former times were mere rustics, because they did not, like our modern belles, subscribe to circulating libraries, read 'Beppo,' prefer 'Gertrude of Wyoming' to the 'Lady of the Lake,' or the 'Lady of the Lake' to 'Gertrude of Wyoming,' differ in their sentiments on points of taste or systems of mineralogy, compose learned treatises, and deliver dissertations on the arts with Corinna of Italy? They had something else to do and to talk about. They were employed in reality, as we see them on the stage, in setting off their

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charms to the greatest advantage, in mortifying their rivals by the most pointed irony, and trifling with their lovers with infinite address. The height of comic elegance and refinement is not to be found in the general diffusion of knowledge and civilization, which tends to level and neutralise, but in the pride of individual distinction, and the contrast between the conflicting pretensions of different ranks in society. [The beauty of these writers in general was that they gave every kind and gradation of character, and they did this because their portraits were taken from life. They were true to nature, full of meaning, perfectly understood and executed in every part. Their coarseness was not mere vulgarity, their refinement was not a mere negation of precision. They refined upon characters, instead of refining them away. Their refinement consisted in working out the parts, not in leaving a vague outline. They painted human nature as it was, and as they saw it with individual character and circumstances, not human nature in general, abstracted from time, place, and circumstance. Strength and refinement are so far from being incompatible, that they assist each other, as the hardest bodies admit of the finest touches and the brightest polish. But there are some minds that never understand anything, but by a negation of its opposite. There is a strength without refinement, which is grossness, as there is a refinement without strength or effect, which is insipidity. Neither are grossness and refinement of manners inconsistent with each other in the same period. The grossness of one class adds to the refinement of another, by circumscribing it, by rendering the feeling more pointed and exquisite, by irritating our self-love, &c. There can be no great refinement of character where there is no distinction of persons. The character of a gentleman is a relative term. The diffusion of knowledge, of artificial and intellectual equality, tends to level this distinction, and to confound that nice perception and high sense of honour, which arises from conspicuousness of situation, and a perpetual attention to personal propriety, and the claims of personal respect. It is common, I think, to mistake refinement of individual character for general knowledge and intellectual subtlety, with which it has little more to do than with the dexterity of a rope dancer or juggler.

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The age of chivalry is gone with the improvements in the art of war, which superseded personal courage, and the character of a gentleman must disappear with those refinements in intellect which render the advantages of rank and situation common almost to any one. The bag-wig and sword followed the helmet and spear, when these outward insignia no longer implied a real superiority, and were a distinction without a difference. Even the grossness of a state of mixed and various manners receives a degree of refinement from contrast and opposition, by being defined and implicated with circumstances. The Upholsterer in 'The Tatler' is not a mere vulgar politician. His intense feeling of interest and curiosity about what does not at all concern him, displays itself in the smallest things, assumes the most eccentric forms, and the peculiarity of his absurdity masks itself under various shifts and evasions, which the same folly, when it becomes epidemic and universal, as it has since done, would not have occasion to resort to. In general it is only in a state of mere barbarism or indiscriminate refinement that we are to look for extreme grossness or complete insipidity. Our modern dramatists, indeed, have happily contrived to unite both extremes. *Omne tulit punctum.* On a soft ground of sentiment they have daubed in the gross absurdities of modern manners void of character, have blended romantic waiting-maids with jockey noblemen, and the humours of the four-in-hand club, and fill up the piece by some vile and illiberal caricature of particular individuals known on the town.

Some persons are for refining comedy into a pure intellectual abstraction, the shadow of a shade. Will they forgive me if I suggest, as an addition to this theory, that the drama in general might be constructed on the same abstruse and philosophical principles? As they imagine that the finest comedies may be formed without individual character, so the deepest tragedies might be composed without real passion. The slightest and most ridiculous distresses might be improved, by art and metaphysical aid, into the most affecting scenes. A young man might naturally be introduced as the hero of a philosophic drama, who had lost the gold medal for a prize-poem; or a young lady, whose verses had been severely criticised in the re-

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views. Nothing could come amiss to this rage for speculative refinement; or the actors might be supposed to come forward, not in any character, but as a sort of chorus, reciting speeches on the general miseries of human life, or reading alternately a passage out of Seneca's 'Morals' or Voltaire's 'Candide.' This might by some be thought a great improvement on English tragedy, or even on the French.

The whole of such reasoning proceeds on a total misconception of the nature of the drama itself. It confounds philosophy with poetry, laboured analysis with intuitive perception, general truth with individual observation. It makes the comic muse a dealer in riddles, and an expounder of hieroglyphics, and a taste for dramatic excellence, a species of the second sight. It would have the drama to be the most remote, whereas it is the most substantial and real of all things. It represents not only looks, but motion and speech. The painter gives only the former, looks without action or speech, and the mere writer only the latter, words without looks or action. Its business and its use is to express the thoughts and character in the most striking and instantaneous manner, in the manner most like reality. It conveys them in all their truth and subtlety, but in all their force and with all possible effect. It brings them into action, obtrudes them on the sight, embodies them in habits, in gestures, in dress, in circumstances, and in speech. It renders every thing overt and ostensible, and presents human nature not in its elementary principles or by general reflections, but exhibits its essential qualities in all their variety of combination, and furnishes subjects for perpetual reflection.

But the instant we begin to refine and generalise beyond a certain point, we are reduced to abstraction, and compelled to see things, not as individuals, or as connected with action and circumstances, but as universal truths, applicable in a degree to all things, and in their extent to none, which therefore it would be absurd to predicate of individuals, or to represent to the senses. The habit, too, of detaching these abstract species and fragments of nature, destroys the power of combining them in complex characters, in every degree of force and variety. The concrete and the abstract cannot co-exist in the same mind. W

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accordingly find, that to genuine comedy succeed satire and novels, the one dealing in general character and description, and the other making out particulars by the assistance of narrative and comment. Afterwards come traits, and collections of anecdotes, bon mots, topics, and quotations, &c. which are applicable to any one, and are just as good told of one person as another. Thus the trio in the Memoirs of M. Grimm, attributed to three celebrated characters, on the death of a fourth, might have the names reversed, and would lose nothing of its effect. In general these traits which are so much admired, are a sort of systematic libels on human nature, which make up, by their malice and acuteness, for their want of wit and sense.

Sir Richard Steele thought that the excellence of the English in comedy was in a great measure owing to the originality and variety of character among them. With respect to that extreme refinement of taste which Madame de Stael advocates to the French, they are neither entirely without it, nor have they so much as they think. The two most refined things in the world are the story of the Falcon in Boccaccio, and the character of Griselda in 'Chaucer,' of neither of which the French would have the smallest conception, because they do not depend on traits, or minute circumstances, or turns of expression, but in infinite simplicity and truth, and an everlasting sentiment. We might retort upon Madame de Stael what she sometimes says in her own defence—"That we understand all in other writers that is worth understanding." As to Moliere, he is quite out of the present question; he lived long before the era of French philosophy and refinement, and is besides almost an English author, quite a *barbare*, in all in which he excels. To suppose that we can go on refining for ever with vivacity and effect, embodying vague abstractions, and particularising flimsy generalities—"showing the very body of the age, its form and pressure," though it has neither form nor pressure left—seems to me the height of speculative absurdity. That undefined "frivolous space," beyond which Madame de Stael regards as "the region of taste and elegance," is, indeed, nothing but the very limbo of vanity, the land of chiromancy and occult conceit, and paradise of fools, where,

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"None yet, but store hereafter from the earth
Shall, like aerial vapours, upward rise
Of all things transitory and vain."]

The alterations which have taken place in conversation and dress, in consequence of the change of manners in the same period, have been by no means favourable to comedy. The present prevailing style of conversation is not personal, but critical and analytical. It consists almost entirely in the discussion of general topics, in ascertaining the merits of authors and their works; and Congreve would be able to derive no better hints from the conversations of our toilettes or drawing-rooms, for the exquisite raillery or poignant repartee of his dialogues, than from a deliberation of the Royal Society. In like manner, the extreme simplicity and graceful uniformity of modern dress, however favourable to the arts, has certainly stript comedy of one of its richest ornaments and most expressive symbols. The sweeping pall, and buskin, and nodding plume were never more serviceable to tragedy, than the enormous hoops and stiff stays worn by the belles of former days, were to the intrigues of comedy. They assisted wonderfully in heightening the mysteries of the passion, and adding to the intricacy of the plot. Wycherley and Vanbrugh could not have spared the dresses of Vandyke. These strange fancy-costumes, perverse disguises, and counterfeit shapes gave an agreeable scope to the imagination. "That seven-fold fence" was a sort of foil to the lusciousness of the dialogue, and a barrier against the sly encroachments of *double entendre*. The greedy eye and bold hand of indiscretion were repressed, which gave a greater license to the tongue. The senses were not to be gratified in an instant. Love was entangled in the folds of the swelling handkerchief, and the desires might wander for ever round the circumference of a quilted petticoat, or find a rich lodging in the folds of a damask stomacher. There was room for years of patient contrivance, for a thousand thoughts, schemes, conjectures, hopes, fears, and wishes. There seemed no end of obstacles and delays; to overcome so many difficulties was the work of ages. A mistress was an angel, concealed behind whalebone, flounces, and brocade. What an undertaking to penetrate through the disguise!

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What an impulse must it give to the blood, what a keenness to the invention, what a volubility to the tongue! "Mr. Smirk, you are a brisk man," was then the most significant commendation; but now-a-days, a woman can be but undressed! Again, the character of the fine gentleman is at present a little obscured on the stage, nor do we immediately recognise it elsewhere, for want of the formidable *insignia* of a bag-wig and sword. Without these outward credentials, the public must not only be unable to distinguish this character intuitively, but it must be "almost afraid to know itself." The present simple disguise of a gentleman is like the *incognito* of kings. The opinion of others affects our opinion of ourselves; and we can hardly expect from a modern man of fashion that air of dignity and superior gracefulness of carriage which those must have assumed who were conscious that all eyes were upon them, and that their lofty pretensions continually exposed them either to public scorn or challenged public admiration. A lord who should take the wall of the plebeian passengers without a sword by his side, would hardly have his claim of precedence acknowledged; nor could he be supposed to have that obsolete air of self-importance about him, which should alone clear the pavement at his approach. It is curious how an ingenious actor of the present day (Mr. Farren) should play Lord Ogleby so well as he does, having never seen anything of the sort in reality. A nobleman in full costume and in broad day, would be a phenomenon like the lord mayor's coach. The attempt at getting up genteel comedy at present is a sort of Galvanic experiment, a revival of the dead.

There is a certain stage of society in which people become conscious of their peculiarities and absurdities, affect to disguise what they are, and set up pretensions to what they are not. This gives rise to a corresponding style of comedy, the object of which is to detect the disguises of self-love, and to make reprisals on these preposterous assumptions of vanity, by marking the contrast between the real and the affected character as severely as possible, and denying to those, who would impose on us for what they are not, even the merit which they have. This is the comedy of artificial life, of wit and satire, such as we

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see it in Congreve, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, &c. To this succeeds a state of society from which the same sort of affectation and pretence are banished by a greater knowledge of the world, or by their successful exposure on the stage; and which, by neutralizing the materials of comic character, both natural and artificial, leaves no comedy at all—but *the sentimental*. Such is our modern comedy. There is a period in the progress of manners anterior to both these, in which the foibles and follies of individuals are of nature's planting, not the growth of art or study; in which they are therefore unconscious of them themselves, or care not who knows them, if they can but have their whim out; and in which, as there is no attempt at imposition, the spectators rather receive pleasure from humouring the inclinations of the persons they laugh at, than wish to give them pain by exposing their absurdity. This may be called the comedy of nature, and it is the comedy which we generally find in Shakspeare.

I have observed in a former lecture, that the most spirited era of our comic drama was that which reflected the conversation, tone, and manners of the profligate, but witty age of Charles II. With the graver and more business-like turn which the Revolution probably gave to our minds, comedy stooped from her bolder and more fantastic flights; and the ferocious attack made by the nonjuring divine, Jeremy Collier, on the immorality and profaneness of the plays then chiefly in vogue, nearly frightened those unwarrantable liberties of wit and humour from the stage which were no longer countenanced at court nor copied in the city. Almost the last of our writers who ventured to hold out in the prohibited track was a female adventurer, Mrs. Centlivre, who seemed to take advantage of the privilege of her sex, and to set at defiance the cynical denunciations of the angry puritanical reformist. Her plays have a provoking spirit and volatile salt in them, which still preserves them from decay Congreve is said to have been jealous of their success at the time, and that it was one cause which drove him in disgust from the stage. If so, it was without any good reason, for these plays have great and intrinsic merit in them, which entitled them to their popularity (and it is only spurious and unde-

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served popularity which should excite a feeling of jealousy in any well-regulated mind:) and besides, their merit was of a kind entirely different from his own. The 'Wonder' and the 'Busy Body' are properly comedies of intrigue. Their interest depends chiefly on the intricate involution and artful *denouément* of the plot, which has a strong tincture of mischief in it, and the wit is seasoned by the archness of the humour and sly allusion to the most delicate points. They are plays evidently written by a very clever woman, but still by a woman: for I hold, in spite of any fanciful theories to the contrary, that there is a distinction discernible in the minds of women as well as in their faces. The 'Wonder' is one of the best of our acting plays. The passion of jealousy in Don Felix is managed in such a way as to give as little offence as possible to the audience, for every appearance combines to excite and confirm his worst suspicions, while we, who are in the secret, laugh at his groundless uneasiness and apprehensions. The ambiguity of the heroine's situation, which is like a continued practical *equivoque*, gives rise to a quick succession of causeless alarms, subtle excuses, and the most hair-breadth 'scapes. The scene near the end, in which Don Felix, pretending to be drunk, forces his way out of Dan Manuel's house, who wants to keep him a prisoner, by producing his marriage-contract in the shape of a pocket-pistol, with the terrors and confusion into which the old gentleman is thrown by this sort of *argumentum ad hominem*, is one of the richest treats the stage affords, and calls forth incessant peals of laughter and applause. Besides the two principal characters (Volante and Don Felix) Lissardo and Flippanta come in very well to carry on the underplot; and the airs and graces of an amorous waiting-maid and conceited man-servant, each copying after their master and mistress, were never hit off with more natural volubility or affected *nonchalance* than in this enviable couple. Lissardo's playing off the diamond ring before the eyes of his mortified Dulcinea, and aping his master's absent manner while repeating—"Roast me these Violantes," as well as the jealous quarrel of the two waiting-maids, which threatens to end in some very extraordinary discoveries, are among the most amusing traits in this comedy. Colonel Briton, the lover of Clara, is a spirited

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and enterprising soldier of fortune; and his servant Gibby's undaunted, incorrigible blundering, with a dash of nationality in it, tells in a very edifying way.—'The Busy Body' is inferior, in the interest of the story and characters, to the 'Wonder;' but it is full of bustle and gaiety from beginning to end. The plot never stands still; the situations succeed one another like the changes of scenery in a pantomime. The nice dove-tailing of the incidents, and cross-reading in the situations, supplies the place of any great force of wit or sentiment. The time for the entrance of each person on the stage is the moment when they are least wanted, and when their arrival makes either themselves or somebody else look as foolish as possible. The laughableness of this comedy, as well as of 'The Wonder,' depends on a brilliant series of mistimed exits and entrances. Marplot is the whimsical hero of the piece, and a standing memorial of unmeaning vivacity and assiduous impertinence.

['The Busy Body' is a comedy that has now held possession of the stage above a hundred years, (the best test of excellence;) and the merit that has enabled it to do so, consists in the ingenuity of the contrivance, the liveliness of the plot, and the striking effect of the situations. Mrs. Centlivre, in this and her other plays, could do nothing without a stratagem; but she could do every thing with one. She delights in putting her *dramatis personæ* continually at their wit's end, and in helping them off with a new evasion; and the subtlety of her resources is in proportion to the criticalness of the situation and the shortness of the notice for resorting to an expedient. Twenty times, in seeing or reading one of her plays, your pulse beats quick, and you become restless and apprehensive for the event; but with a fine theatrical sleight of hand, she lets you off, undoes the knot of the difficulty, and you breathe freely again, and have a hearty laugh into the bargain. In short, with her knowledge of chambermaid's tricks, and insight into the intricate foldings of lovers' hearts, she plays with the events of comedy, as a juggler shuffles about a pack of cards, to serve his own purposes, and to the surprise of the spectator. This is one of the most delightful employments of the dramatic art. It costs nothing—but a voluntary tax on the inventive powers of the

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author; and it produces, when successfully done, profit and praise to one party, and pleasure to all. To show the extent and importance of theatrical amusements (which some grave persons would decry altogether, and which no one can extol too highly,) a friend of ours, whose name will be as well known to posterity as it is to his contemporaries, was not long ago mentioning, that one of the earliest and most memorable impressions ever made on his mind, was the seeing 'Venice Preserved' acted in a country town when he was only nine years old. But he added, that an elderly lady who took him to see it, lamented, notwithstanding the wonder and delight he had experienced, that instead of 'Venice Preserved,' they had not gone to see 'The Busy Body,' which had been acted the night before. This was fifty years ago, since which, and for fifty years before that, it has been acted a thousand times in town and country, giving delight to the old, the young, and middle-aged, passing the time carelessly, and affording matter for agreeable reflection afterwards, making us think ourselves, and wish to be thought, the men equal to Sir George Airy in grace and spirit, the women to Miranda and Isabinda in love and beauty, and all of us superior to Marplot in wit. Among the scenes that might be mentioned in this comedy, as striking instances of happy stage effect, are Miranda's contrivance to escape from Sir George, by making him turn his back upon her to hear her confession of love, and the ludicrous attitude in which he is left waiting for the rest of her speech after the lady has vanished; his offer of the hundred pounds to her guardian to make love to her in his presence, and when she receives him in dumb show, his answering for both; his situation concealed behind the chimney-screen; his supposed metamorphosis into a monkey, and his deliverance from thence in that character by the interference of Marplot; Mrs. Patch's sudden conversion of the mysterious love letter into a charm for the tooth-ache, and the whole of Marplot's meddling and blunders. The last character is taken from Dryden and the Duchess of Newcastle; and is, indeed, the only attempt at character in the play. It is amusing and superficial. We see little of the puzzled perplexity of his brain, but his actions are absurd enough. He whiffles about the stage with

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considerable volubility, and makes a very lively automaton. Sir George Airy sets out for a scene or two in a spirited manner, but afterwards the character evaporates in the name; and he becomes as common place as his friend Charles, who merely laments over his misfortunes, or gets out of them by following the suggestions of his valet or his valet's mistress. Miranda is the heroine of the piece, and has a right to be so; for she is a beauty and an heiress. Her friend has less to recommend her; but who can refuse to fall in love with her name? What volumes of sighs, what a world of love, is breathed in the very sound alone—the letters that form the charming name of Isabinda!]

The comedies of Steele were the first that were written expressly with a view not to imitate the manners, but to reform the morals of the age. The author seems to be all the time on his good behaviour, as if writing a comedy was no very creditable employment, and as if the ultimate object of his ambition was a dedication to the queen. Nothing can be better meant, or more inefficient. It is almost a misnomer to call them comedies; they are rather homilies in dialogue, in which a number of very pretty ladies and gentlemen discuss the fashionable topics of gaming, of duelling, of seduction, of scandal, &c. with a sickly sensibility, that shows as little hearty aversion to vice as sincere attachment to virtue. By not meeting the question fairly on the ground of common experience, by slurring over the objections, and varnishing the answers, the whole distinction between virtue and vice (as it appears in evidence in the comic drama) is reduced to verbal professions, and a mechanical, infantine goodness. The sting is, indeed, taken out of what is bad; but what is good, at the same time, loses its manhood and nobility of nature by this enervating process. I am unwilling to believe that the only difference between right and wrong is mere cant, or make-believe; and I imagine, that the advantage which the moral drama possesses over mere theoretical precept or general declamation is this, that by being left free to imitate nature as it is, and not being referred to an ideal standard, it is its own voucher for the truth of the inferences it draws, for its warnings, or its examples; that it brings out the higher as well as lower principles of action, in the most striking

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and convincing points of view; satisfies us that virtue is not a mere shadow; clothes it with passion, imagination, reality, and, if I may say so, translates morality from the language of theory into that of practice. But Steele, by introducing the artificial mechanism of morals on the stage, and making his characters act, not from individual motives and existing circumstances, the truth of which every one must feel, but from vague topics and general rules, the truth of which is the very thing to be proved in detail, has lost that fine 'vantage ground which the stage lends to virtue; takes away from it its best grace, the grace of sincerity; and, instead of making it a test of truth, has made it an echo of the doctrine of the schools—and "the one cries *Mum*, while t'other cries *Budget!*" The comic writer, in my judgment, then, ought to open the volume of nature and the world for his living materials, and not take them out of his ethical common-place book; for in this way, neither will throw any additional light upon the other. In all things there is a division of labour; and I am as little for introducing the tone of the pulpit or reading-desk on the stage, as for introducing plays and interludes in church-time, according to the good old popish practice. It was a part, indeed, of Steele's plan, "by the politeness of his style and the genteelness of his expressions,"* to bring about a reconciliation between things which he thought had hitherto been kept too far asunder, to wed the graces to the virtues, and blend pleasure with profit. And in this design he succeeded admirably in his 'Tatler,' and some other works, but in his comedies he has failed. He has confounded instead of harmonising—has taken away its gravity from wisdom, and its charm from gaiety. It is not that in his plays we find "some soul of goodness in things evil;" but they have no soul either of good or bad. His 'Funeral' is as trite, as tedious, and full of formal grimace, as a procession of mutes and undertakers. The characters are made either affectedly good and forbearing, with "all the milk of human kindness," or purposely bad and disgusting, for the others to exercise their squeamish charities upon them. 'The Conscious Lovers' is

* See Mandeville's 'Fable of the Bees.'

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the best, but that is far from good, with the exception of the scene between Mr. Thomas and Phillis, who are fellow-servants, and commence lovers from being set to clean the window together. We are here once more in the company of our old friend, Isaac Bickerstaff, Esq. Indiana is as listless and as insipid as a drooping figure on an Indian screen; and Mr. Myrtle and Mr. Bevil only just disturb the still life of the scene. I am sorry that in this censure I should have Parson Adams against me, who thought 'The Conscious Lovers' the only fit play for a Christian to see, and as good as a sermon. For myself, I would rather have read, or heard him read, one of his own manuscript sermons; and if the volume which he left behind him in his saddle-bags was to be had in print for love or money, I would at any time walk ten miles on foot only to get a sight of it.

Addison's 'Drummer, or the Haunted House,' is a pleasant farce enough, but adds nothing to our idea of the author of the 'Spectator.'

Pope's joint after-piece, called 'An Hour after Marriage,' was not a successful attempt. He brought into it "an alligator stuffed," which disconcerted the ladies, and gave just offence to the critics. Pope was too fastidious for a farce writer; and yet the most fastidious people, when they step out of their regular routine, are apt to become the grossest. The smallest offences against probability or decorum are, to their habitual scrupulousness, as unpardonable as the greatest. This was the rock on which Pope probably split. The affair was, however, hushed up; and he wreaked his discreet vengeance at leisure on the "odious endeavours," and more odious success of Colley Cibber in the line in which he had failed. Gay's 'What-d'ye-call-it,' is not one of his happiest things. His 'Polly' is a complete failure, which, indeed, is the common fate of second parts. If the original Polly, in 'The Beggars' Opera,' had not had more winning ways with her, she would hardly have had so many countesses for representatives as she has had, from her first appearance up to the present moment. [Gay's capital work is his 'Beggars' Opera.' It is, indeed, a master-piece of wit and genius, not to say of morality. In composing it he chose a very un-

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promising ground to work upon, and he has prided himself in adorning it with all the graces, the precision and brilliancy of style. It is a vulgar error to call this a vulgar play. So far from it, that I do not scruple to say that it appears to me one of the most refined productions in the language. The elegance of the composition is in exact proportion to the coarseness of the materials; by "happy alchemy of mind," the author has extracted an essence of refinement from the dregs of human life, and turns its very dross into gold. The scenes, characters, and incidents are, in themselves, of the lowest and most disgusting kind; but, by the sentiments and reflections which are put into the mouths of highwaymen, turnkeys, their mistresses, wives, or daughters, he has converted this motley group into a set of fine gentlemen and ladies, satirists and philosophers. He has also effected this transformation without once violating probability, or "o'erstepping the modesty of nature." In fact, Gay has turned the tables on the critics; and by the assumed license of the mock-heroic style has enabled himself to do justice to nature, that is, to give all the force, truth, and locality of real feeling to the thoughts and expressions, without being called to the bar of false taste and affected delicacy. The extreme beauty and feeling of the song, "Woman is like the fair flower in its lustre," are only equalled by its characteristic propriety and *naiveté*. It may be said that this is taken from Tibullus; but there is nothing about Covent-garden in Tibullus. Polly describes her lover going to the gallows with the same touching simplicity, and with all the natural fondness of a young girl in her circumstances, who sees in his approaching catastrophe nothing but the misfortunes and the personal accomplishments of the object of her affections. "I see him sweeter than the nosegay in his hand: the admiring crowd lament that so lovely a youth should come to an untimely end—even butchers weep, and Jack Ketch refuses his fee rather than consent to tie the fatal knot." The preservation of the character and costume is complete. It has been said by a great authority—"There is some soul of goodness in things evil:"—and 'The Beggars' Opera' is a good natured but instructive comment on this text. The poet has thrown all the gaiety and sunshine of the imagination, all the

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intoxication of pleasure, and the vanity of despair, round the short-lived existence of his heroes; while Peachum and Lockitt are seen in the back-ground, parcelling out their months and weeks between them. The general view exhibited of human life, is of the most subtle and abstracted kind. The author has, with great felicity, brought out the good qualities and interesting emotions almost inseparable from the lowest conditions; and, with the same penetrating glance, has detected the disguises which rank and circumstances lend to exalted vice. Every line in this sterling comedy sparkles with wit, and is fraught with the keenest sarcasm. The very wit, however, takes off from the offensiveness of the satire; and I have seen great statesmen, very great statesmen, heartily enjoying the joke, laughing most immoderately at the compliments paid to them as not much worse than pickpockets and cut-throats in a different line of life, and pleased, as it were, to see themselves humanised by some sort of fellowship with their kind. Indeed, it may be said that the moral of the piece is to show the vulgarity of vice; or that the same violations of integrity and decorum, the same habitual sophistry in palliating their want of principle, are common to the great and powerful, with the lowest and most contemptible of the species. What can be more convincing than the arguments used by these would-be-politicians, to show that in hypocrisy, selfishness, and treachery, they do not come up to many of their betters? The exclamation of Mrs. Peachum, when her daughter marries Macheath, "Hussey, hussey, you will be as ill-used, and as much neglected, as if you had married a lord," is worth all Miss Hannah More's labored invectives on the laxity of the manners of high life![*]

[*] The late ingenious Baron Grim, of acute critical memory, was up to the merit of the 'Beggars' Opera.' In his Correspondence, he says, "If it be true that the nearer a writer is to nature, the more certain he is of pleasing, it must be allowed that the English, in their dramatic pieces, have greatly the advantage over us. There reigns in them an inestimable tone of nature, which the timidity of our taste has banished from French pieces. M. Patu has just published, in two volumes, 'A selection of smaller dramatic pieces, translated from the English,' which will eminently support what I have advanced. The principal one among this selection is the celebrated 'Beg-

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Fielding was a comic writer, as well as a novelist; but his comedies are very inferior to his novels: they are particularly deficient both in plot and character. The only excellence which they have is that of the style, which is the only thing in which his novels are deficient. The only dramatic pieces of Fielding that retain possession of the stage are, 'The Mock Doctor' (a tolerable translation from Moliere's *Medecin malgrè lui*,) and his 'Tom Thumb,' a very admirable piece of burlesque. The absurdities and bathos of some of our celebrated tragic writers could hardly be credited, but for the notes at the bottom of this preposterous medley of bombast, containing his authorities and the parallel passages. Dryden, Lee, and Shadwell, make no very shining figure there. Mr. Liston makes a better figure in the text. His Lord Grizzle is prodigious. What a name, and what a person! It has been said of this ingenious actor, that "he is very great in Liston;" but he is even greater in Lord Grizzle. What a wig is that he wears! How flighty, flaunting and fantastical! Not "like those hanging locks of young Apollo," nor like the serpent-hair of the Furies of Æschylus; but as troublous, though not as tragical as the

gars' Opera' of Gay, which has had such an amazing run in England. We are here in the very worst company imaginable; the *dramatis personæ* are robbers, pickpockets, gaolers, prostitutes, and the like; yet we are highly amused, and in no haste to quit them; and why? Because there is nothing in the world more original or more natural. There is no occasion to compare our most celebrated comic operas with this, to see how far we are removed from truth and nature, and this is the reason that, notwithstanding our wit, we are almost always flat and insipid. Two faults are generally committed by our writers, which they seem incapable of avoiding. They think they have done wonders if they have only faithfully copied the dictionaries of the personages they bring upon the stage, forgetting that the great art is to choose the moments of character and passion in those who are to speak, since it is those moments alone that render them interesting. For want of this discrimination, the piece necessarily sinks into insipidity and monotony. Why do almost all M. Vade's pieces fatigue the audience to death? Because all his characters speak the same language; because each is a perfect resemblance of the other. Instead of this, in 'The Beggars' Opera,' among eight or ten girls of the town, each has her separate character, her peculiar trials, her peculiar modes of expression, which give her a marked distinction from her companions."—Vol. I., p. 185.

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one—as imposing, though less classical than the other. "*Que terribles sont ces cheveux gris*," might be applied to Lord Grizzle's most valiant and magnanimous curls. This sapient courtier's "fell of hair does at a dismal treatise rouse and stir as life were in't." His wits seem flying away with the disorder of his flowing locks, and to sit as loosely on our hero's head as the caul of his peruke. What a significant vacancy in his open eyes and mouth! what a listlessness in his limbs! what an abstraction of all thought or purpose! With what an headlong impulse of enthusiasm he throws himself across the stage when he is going to be married, crying, "Hey for Doctor's Commons," as if the genius of folly had taken whole-length possession of his person! And then his dancing is equal to the discovery of a sixth sense—which is certainly very different from *common sense!* If this extraordinary personage cuts a great figure in his life, he is no less wonderful in his death and burial. "From the sublime to the ridiculous there is but one step;" and this character would almost seem to prove, that there is but one step from the ridiculous to the sublime.—Lubin Log, however inimitable in itself, is itself an imitation of something existing elsewhere; but the Lord Grizzle of this truly original actor, is a pure invention of his own. His Caper, in the 'Widow's Choice,' can alone dispute the palm with it in incoherence and volatility; for that, too, "is high fantastical," almost as full of emptiness, in as grand a gusto of insipidity, as profoundly absurd, as elaborately nonsensical! Why does not Mr. Liston play in some of Moliere's farces? I heartily wish that the author of 'Love, Law, and Physic,' would launch him on the London boards in Monsieur Jourdain or Monsieur Pourceaugnac. This genius of Liston and Moliere together—

"—— Must bid a gay defiance to mischance."

Mr. Liston is an actor hardly belonging to the present age. Had he lived, unfortunately for us, in the time of Colley Cibber, we should have seen what a splendid niche he would have given him in his 'Apology.'

Cibber is the hero of the Dunciad: but it cannot be said of

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him, that he was "by merit raised to that bad eminence." He was pert, not dull; a coxcomb, not a blockhead; vain, but not malicious. Pope's unqualified abuse of him was mere spleen; and the most obvious provocation to it seems to have been an excess of flippant vivacity in the constitution of Cibber. That Cibber's 'Birth-day Odes' were dull, is true; but this was not peculiar to him. It is an objection which may be made equally to Shadwell's, to Whitehead's, to Warton's, to Pye's, and to all others, except those which of late years have *not* been written! In his 'Apology for his own Life,' Cibber is a most amusing biographer: happy in his own good opinion, the best of all others; teeming with animal spirits, and uniting the self-sufficiency of youth with the garrulity of age. His account of his waiting as a page behind the chair of the old Duchess of Marlborough at the time of the Revolution, who was then in the bloom of youth and beauty, which seems to have called up in him the secret homage of "distant, enthusiastic, respectful love," fifty years after, and the compliment he pays to her (then in her old age,) "a great grandmother without gray hairs," is as delightful as anything in fiction or romance; and is the evident origin of Mr. Burke's celebrated apostrophe to the Queen of France. Nor is the political confession of faith which he makes on this occasion, without a suitable mixture of vanity and sincerity: the vanity we may ascribe to the player, the sincerity to the politician. The self-complacency with which he talks of his own success, both as a player and a writer, is not greater than the candour and cordiality with which he does heaped justice to the merits of his theatrical contemporaries and predecessors. He brings down the history of the stage, either by the help of observation or tradition, from the time of Shakspeare to his own; and quite dazzles the reader with a constellation of male and female, of tragic and comic, of past and present excellence. He gives portraits at full length of Kynaston, of Betterton, of Booth, of Estcourt, of Pinkethman and Dogget, of Mohun and Wilks, of Nokes and Sandford, of Mrs. Montford, of Mrs. Oldfield, of Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Bracegirdle, and of others of equal note; with delectable criticisms on their several performances, and anecdotes of their private lives, with scarcely a single

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particle of jealousy or ill-nature, or any other motive than to expatiate in the delight of talking of the ornaments of his art, and a wish to share his pleasure with the reader. I wish I could quote some of these theatrical sketches; but the time presses. The latter part of his work is less entertaining when he becomes Manager, and gives us an exact statement of his squabbles with the Lord Chamberlain, and the expense of his ground-rent, his repairs, his scenery, and his dresses.—In his plays, his personal character perhaps predominates too much over the inventiveness of his Muse; but so far from being dull, he is everywhere light, fluttering, and airy. His pleasure in himself made him desirous to please; but his fault was, that he was too soon satisfied with what he did; that his indolence or want of thought led him to indulge in the vein that flowed from him with most ease, and that his vanity did not allow him to distinguish between what he did best and worst. His 'Careless Husband' is a very elegant piece of agreeable, thoughtless writing; and the incident of Lady Easy throwing her handkerchief over her husband, whom she finds asleep in a chair by the side of her waiting-woman, was an admirable contrivance, taken, as he informs us, from real life. His 'Double Gallant,' which has been lately revived, though it cannot rank in the first, may take its place in the second or third class of comedies. It abounds in character, bustle, and stage-effect. It belongs to what may be called the composite style; and very happily mixes up the comedy of intrigue, such as we see it in Mrs. Centlivre's Spanish plots, with a tolerable share of the wit and spirit of Congreve and Vanbrugh. As there is a good deal of wit, there is a spice of wickedness in this play, which was a privilege of the good old style of comedy, not altogether abandoned in Cibber's time. The luscious vein of the dialogue is stopped short in many of the scenes of the revived play, though not before we perceive its object—

> "—— In hidden mazes running,
> With wanton haste and giddy cunning."

These imperfect hints of double meanings, however, pass off without any marks of reprobation; for, unless they are insisted

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on, or made pretty broad, the audience, from being accustomed to the cautious purity of the modern drama, are not very expert in decyphering the equivocal allusion, for which they are not on the look-out. To what is this increased nicety owing? Was it that vice, from being formerly less common (though more fashionable,) was less catching than at present? The first inference is by no means in our favour: for though I think that the grossness of manners prevailing in our fashionable comedies was a direct transcript of the manners of the court at the time, or in the period immediately preceding, yet the same grossness of expression and allusion existed long before, as in the plays of Shakspeare and Ben Jonson, when there was not this grossness of manners, and it has of late years been gradually refining away. There is a certain grossness or freedom of expression, which may arise as often from unsuspecting simplicity as from avowed profligacy. Whatever may be our progress either in virtue or vice since the age of Charles II., certain it is that our manners are not mended since the time of Elizabeth and Charles I. Is it, then, that vice was formerly a thing more to be wondered at than imitated; that behind the rigid barriers of religion and morality it might be exposed freely, without the danger of any serious practical consequences—whereas now that the safeguards of wholesome authority and prejudice are removed, we seem afraid to trust our eyes or ears with a single situation or expression of a loose tendency, as if the mere mention of licentiousness implied a conscious approbation of it, and the extreme delicacy of our moral sense would be debauched by the bare suggestion of the possibility of vice? But I shall not take upon me to answer this question. The characters in the 'Double Gallant' are well kept up. At-All and Lady Dainty are the two most prominent characters in this comedy, and those into which Cibber has put most of his own nature and genius. They are the essence of active impertinence and fashionable frivolity. Cibber, in short, though his name has been handed down to us as a by-word of impudent pretension and impenetrable dulness by the classical pen of his accomplished rival, who, unfortunately, did not admit of any merit beyond the narrow circle of wit and friendship in which he himself moved, was a gentleman and a

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scholar of the old school; a man of wit and pleasantry in conversation, a diverting mimic, an excellent actor, an admirable dramatic critic, and one of the best comic writers of his age. His works (always excepting his 'Birth-day Odes,') instead of being a *caput mortuum* of literature, had a great deal of the spirit, with a little too much of the froth. His 'Nonjuror' was taken from Moliere's 'Tartuffe,' and has been altered to the 'Hypocrite.' [This latter is a lively but very provoking comedy, and it is provoking from the nature of the subject. If such things are, it is provoking; or if they are not, that we should be made to believe them. In the 'Tartuffe,' the glaring improbability of the plot, the absurdity of a man's imposing on the credulity of another against the evidence of his senses, and without any proof of the sincerity of a religious charlatan but his own professions, is carried off by long formal speeches and pompous casuistry. We find our patience tired out, and our understandings perplexed, as if we were sitting in a court of law. Tartuffe is a plausible, fair-spoken, long-winded knave, who, if he could not be supposed to convince, might be supposed to confound his auditors. In the 'Hypocrite' of Bickerstaff, the insidious, fawning, sophistical, accomplished French Abbé, is modernized into a low-lived, canting, impudent Methodist preacher. Dr. Cantwell is a sturdy beggar, and nothing more; he is not an impostor, but a bully. There is not in anything he says or does the least reason why Sir John Lambert should admit him into his family and friendship, suffer him to make love to his wife and daughter, disinherit his son in his favour, and obstinately refuse to listen to any insinuation or proof offered against the virtue and piety of his treacherous inmate. It might be said, that in the manners of the old French *regime* there was something to account for the blind ascendancy acquired by the priest over his benefactor, who might have submitted to be enthralled, robbed, cheated, and insulted, as a tacit proof of his religion and loyalty. The inquisitorial power exercised by the church was then so great, that a man who refused to be priest-ridden, might very soon be suspected of designs against the state. Such, at least, is the best account we can give of the sameness of Moliere's 'Organ.' But in this country nothing of the kind could happen. A fel-

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low like Dr. Cantwell could only have got admittance into the kitchen of Sir John Lambert, or to the ear of old Lady Lambert. The animal magnetism of such spiritual guides is, with us, directed against the weaker nerves of our female devotees. In the original, we admire the talents of the principal character; in the translation, we only wonder at the incredible weakness of his dupes. In short, the fault of the piece is that the author has attempted to amalgamate two contradictory characters, by engrafting our vulgar Methodist on the courtly French impostor; and this defect could not be remedied in the execution, however spirited or forcible. Mawworm is quite a local and rational character, and admirably fitted into the piece.] 'Love's Last Shift' appears to have been the author's favourite; and he received the compliments of Sir John Vanbrugh and old Mr. Southern upon it—the latter said to him:—"Young man, your play is a good one; and it will succeed, if you do not spoil it by your acting." His plays did not always take equally. It is ludicrous to hear him complaining of the ill success of one of them, 'Love in a Riddle,' a pastoral comedy, "of a nice morality" and well spoken sentiments, which he wrote in opposition to the 'Beggars' Opera,' at the time when its worthless and vulgar rival was carrying everything triumphantly before it. Cibber brings this, with much pathetic *naïveté*, as an instance of the lamentable want of taste in the town!

The 'Suspicious Husband' by Hoadley, the 'Jealous Wife' by Colman, and the 'Clandestine Marriage' by Colman and Garrick, are excellent plays of the middle style of comedy, which are formed rather by judgment and selection than by any original vein of genius; and have all the parts of a good comedy in degree, without having any one prominent, or to excess. The character of Ranger, in the 'Suspicious Husband,' is only a variation of those of Farquhar, of the same class as his Sir Harry Wildair and others, without equal spirit. The 'Jealous Wife' herself is, however, a dramatic *chef-d'œuvre*, and worthy of being acted as often, and better than it is. [Colman the elder, was the translator of Terence: and the 'Jealous Wife' is a classical play. The plot is regular, the characters well supported, and the moral the best in the world. The dia-

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logue has more sense than wit. The ludicrous arises from the skilful developement of the characters, and the absurdities they commit in their own persons, rather than from the smart reflections which are made upon them by others. Thus nothing can be more ridiculous or more instructive than the scenes of which Mrs. Oakly is the heroine, yet they are all serious and unconscious: she exposes herself to our contempt and ridicule by the part she acts, by the airs she gives herself, and her fantastic behaviour in the situations in which she is placed. In other words, the character is pure comedy, not satire. Congreve's comedies for the most part are satires, in which, from an exuberance of wit, the different speakers play off their sharp-pointed raillery on one another's foibles, real or supposed The best and most genuine kind of comedy, because the most dramatic, is that of character or humour, in which the persons introduced upon the stage are left to betray their own folly by their words and actions. The progressive winding up of the story of the present comedy is excellently managed. The jealousy and hysteric violence of Mrs. Oakly increase every moment, as the pretext for them becomes more and more frivolous. The attention is kept alive by our doubts about Oakly's wavering (but in the end triumphant) firmness; and the arch insinuations and well-concerted home-thrusts of the Major heighten the comic interest of the scene. There is only one circumstance on which this veteran bachelor's freedom of speech might have thrown a little more light, namely, that the married lady's jealousy is in truth only a pretence for the exercise of her domineering spirit in general; so that we are left at last in some uncertainty as to the turn which this humour may take, and as to the future repose of her husband, though the affair of Miss Russet is satisfactorily cleared up. The under-plot of the two lovers is very ingeniously fitted into the principal one, and is not without interest in itself. Charles Oakly is a spirited, well-meaning, thoughtless young fellow, and Harriet Russet is an amiable romantic girl, in that very common, but always romantic situation—in love. Her persecution from the addresses of Lord Trinket and Sir Harry Beagle fans the gentle flame which had been kindled just a year before in her breast, produces the ad-

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ventures and cross-purposes of the plot, and at last reconciles her to, and throws her into the arms of her lover, in spite of her resentment for his misconduct and apparent want of delicacy. The figure which Lord Trinket and Lady Freelove make in the piece is as odious and contemptible as it is possible for people in that class of life (and for no others) to make. The insolence, the meanness, the affectation, the hollowness, the want of humanity, sincerity, principle, and delicacy, are such as can only be found where artificial rank and station in society supersede not merely a regard to propriety of conduct, but the necessity even of an attention to appearances. The morality of the stage has (we are ready to hope) told in that direction as well as others, has, in some measure, suppressed the suffocating pretensions and flaunting affectation of vice and folly in "persons of honour," and, as it were, humanized rank and title. The pictures drawn of the finished depravity of such characters in high life, in the old comedies and novels, can hardly have been thrown away upon the persons themselves, any more than upon the world at large. Little Terence O'Cutler, the delicious *protegé* of Lord Trinket and Lady Freelove, is a fit instrument for them to use, and follows in the train of such principals as naturally and assuredly as their shadow. Sir Harry Beagle is a coarse, but striking character of a thorough-bred fox-hunting country squire. He has but one idea in his head, but one sentiment in his heart—and that is his stud. This idea haunts his imagination, tinges or imbues every other object, and accounts for his whole phraseology, appearance, costume, and conduct. Sir Harry's ruling passion is varied very ingeniously, and often turned to a very ludicrous account. There is a necessary monotony in the humour, which arises from a want of more than one idea, but the obviousness of the jest almost makes up for the recurrence of it; if the means of exciting mirth are mechanical, the effect is sure; and to say that a hearty laugh is cheaply purchased, is not a serious objection against it When an author is terribly conscious of plagiarism, he seldom confesses it; when the obligation does not press his conscience, he sometimes does. Colman, in the advertisement to the first edition of the 'Jealous Wife,' apologises for the freedom which he

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has used in borrowing from 'Tom Jones.' In reading this modest excuse, though we had seen the play several times, we could not imagine what part of the plot was taken from Fielding. We did not suspect that Miss Russet was Sophia Western, and that old Russet and Sir Harry Beagle between them somehow represented Squire Western and young Blifil. But so it is! The outline of the plot and some of the characters are certainly the same, but the filling up destroys the likeness. There is all in the novel that there is in the play, but there is so much in the novel that is not in the play, that the total impression is quite different, and loses even an appearance of resemblance. In the same manner, though a profile or a shade of a face is exactly the same as the original, we with difficulty recognize it from the absence of so many other particulars. Colman might have kept his own secret, and no one would have been the wiser for it.]

The 'Clandestine Marriage' is nearly without a fault; and has some lighter theatrical graces, which I suspect Garrick threw into it. Canton is, I should think, his, though this classification of him among the ornamental parts of the play may seem whimsical. Garrick's genius does not appear to have been equal to the construction of a solid drama; but he could retouch and embellish with great gaiety and knowledge of the technicalities of his art. Garrick not only produced joint-pieces and after-pieces, but often set off the plays of his friends and contemporaries with the garnish, the *sauce piquant*, of prologues and epilogues, at which he had an admirable knack.—The elder Colman's translation of 'Terence,' I may here add, has always been considered, by good judges, as an equal proof of the author's knowledge of the Latin language, and taste in his own.

Bickerstaff's plays and comic operas are continually acted; they come under the class of mediocrity, generally speaking. Their popularity seems to be chiefly owing to the unaffected ease and want of pretension with which they are written, with a certain humorous *naïveté* in the lower characters, and an exquisite adaptation of the music to the songs. His 'Love in a Village' is one of the most delightful comic operas on the stage. It is truly pastoral; and the sense of music hovers over the very

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scene like the breath of morning. In his alteration of the 'Tartuffe' he has spoiled the 'Hypocrite,' but he has added Mawworm.

Mrs. Cowley's comedies of the 'Belle's Stratagem,' 'Who's the Dupe,' and others, are of the second or third class; they are rather *refaccimentos* of the characters, incidents and materials of former writers, got up with considerable liveliness and ingenuity, than original compositions, with marked qualities of their own.

Goldsmith's 'Good-natured Man' is inferior to 'She Stoops to Conquer;' and even this last play, with all its shifting vivacity, is rather a sportive and whimsical effusion of the author's fancy, a delightful and delicately managed caricature, than a genuine comedy. [It, however, bears the stamp of the author's genius, which was an undefinable mixture of the original and imitative. His plot, characters, and incidents are all apparently new; and yet, when you come to look into them, they are all old, with little variation or disguise: that is, the author sedulously avoided the beaten, vulgar path, and sought for singularity, but found it rather in the unhackneyed and eccentric inventions of those who had gone before him, than in his own stores. The 'Vicar of Wakefield,' which abounds more than any of his works in delightful and original traits, is still very much borrowed, in its general tone and outline, from Fielding's 'Joseph Andrews.' Again, the characters and adventures of Tony Lumpkin, and the ridiculous conduct of his mother, in the present comedy, are a counterpart (even to the incident of the theft of the jewels) of those of the Widow Blackacre, and her booby son in Wycherley's 'Plain Dealer.'

This sort of plagiarism, which gives us a repetition of new and striking pictures of human life, is much to be preferred to the dull routine of trite, vapid, every-day common-places; but it is more dangerous, as the stealing of pictures or family plate, where the property can be immediately identified, is more liable to detection than the stealing of bank-notes, or the current coin of the realm. Dr. Johnson's sarcasm against some writer, that "his singularity was not his excellence," cannot be applied to Goldsmith's writings in general; but we are not sure whether it might not in severity be applied to 'She Stoops to Conquer

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The incidents and characters are many of them exceedingly amusing; but they are so, a little at the expense of probability and *bienseance*. Tony Lumpkin is a very essential and unquestionably comic personage; but certainly his absurdities or his humours fail of none of their effect for want of being carried far enough. He is in his own sex what a hoyden is in the other. He is that vulgar nickname, a *hobbety-hoy*, dramatised; forward and sheepish, mischievous and idle, cunning and stupid, with the vices of the man and the follies of the boy; fond of low company, and giving himself all the airs of consequence of the young squire. His vacant delight in playing at cup and ball, and his impenetrable confusion and obstinate gravity in spelling the letter, drew fresh beauties from Mr. Liston's face. Young Marlow's bashfulness in the scenes with his mistress is, when well acted, irresistibly ludicrous; but still nothing can quite overcome our incredulity as to the existence of such a character in the present day, and in the rank of life, and with the education which Marlow is supposed to have had. It is a highly amusing caricature, a ridiculous fancy, but no more. One of the finest and most delicate touches of character is in the transition from the modest gentleman's manner with his mistress, to the easy and agreeable tone of familiarity with the supposed chamber-maid, which was not total and abrupt, but exactly such in kind and degree as such a character of natural reserve and constitutional timidity would undergo from the change of circumstances. Of the other characters in the piece, the most amusing are Tony Lumpkin's associates at the Three Pigeons; and of these we profess the greatest partiality for the important showman who declares that "his bear dances to none but the genteelest of tunes, 'Water parted from the Sea,' or the minuet in 'Ariadne!'" This is certainly the "high-fantastical" of low comedy.]

Murphy's plays of 'All in the Wrong' and 'Know Your Own Mind,' are admirably written; with sense, spirit, and conception of character, but without any great effect of the humorous, or that truth of feeling which distinguishes the boundary between the absurdities of natural character and the gratuitous fictions of the poet's pen. The heroes of these two plays, Milla-

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mour and Sir Benjamin Constant, are too ridiculous in their caprices to be tolerated, except in farce; and yet their follies are so flimsy, so motiveless, and fine-spun, as not to be intelligible, or to have any effect in their only proper sphere. Both his principal pieces are said to have suffered by their similarity, first, to Colman's 'Jealous Wife,' and next to the 'School for Scandal,' though in both cases he had the undoubted priority. It is hard that the fate of plagiarism should attend upon originality; yet it is clear that the elements of the 'School for Scandal' are not sparingly scattered in Murphy's comedy of 'Know Your Own Mind,' which appeared before the latter play, only to be eclipsed by it. This brings me to speak of Sheridan.

Mr. Sheridan has been justly called "a dramatic star of the first magnitude;" and, indeed, among the comic writers of the last century he "shines like Hesperus among the lesser lights." He has left four several dramas behind him, all different or of different kinds, and all excellent in their way;—the 'School for Scandal,' the 'Rivals,' the 'Duenna,' and the 'Critic.' The attraction of this last piece is, however, less in the mock tragedy rehearsed than in the dialogue of the comic scenes, and in the character of Sir Fretful Plagiary, which is supposed to have been intended for Cumberland. If some of the characters in the 'School for Scandal' were contained in Murphy's comedy of 'Know Your Own Mind,' (and certainly some of Dashwoud's detached speeches and satirical sketches are written with quite as firm and masterly a hand as any of those given to the members of the scandalous club, Mrs. Candour or Lady Sneerwell,) yet they were buried in it for want of grouping and relief, like the colours of a well-drawn picture sunk in the canvass. Sheridan brought them out and exhibited them in all their glory. If that gem, the character of Joseph Surface, was Murphy's, the splendid and more valuable setting was Sheridan's. He took Murphy's Malvil from his lurking-place in the closet, and "dragged the struggling monster into day" upon the stage. That is, he gave interest, life, and action, or, in other words, its dramatic being, to the mere conception and written specimens of a character. This is the merit of Sheridan's comedies, that everything in them tells—there is no labour in vain. His

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comic muse does not go about prying into obscure corners, or collecting idle curiosities, but shows her laughing face and points to her rich treasure—the follies of mankind. She is garlanded and crowned with roses and vine-leaves. Her eyes sparkle with delight, and her heart runs over with good-natured malice. Her step is firm and light, and her ornaments consummate! The 'School for Scandal' is, if not the most original, perhaps the most finished and faultless comedy which we have When it is acted you hear people all around you exclaiming "Surely it is impossible for anything to be cleverer." The scene in which Charles sells all the old family pictures but his uncle's, who is the purchaser in disguise, and that of the discovery of Lady Teazle when the screen falls, are among the happiest and most highly wrought that comedy, in its wide and brilliant range, can boast. Besides the wit and ingenuity of this play, there is a genial spirit of frankness and generosity about it that relieves the heart as well as clears the lungs. It professes a faith in the natural goodness as well as habitual depravity of human nature. While it strips off the mask of hypocrisy it inspires a confidence between man and man. As often as it is acted it must serve to clear the air of that low, creeping, pestilent fog of cant and mysticism, which threatens to confound every native impulse, or honest conviction, in the nauseous belief of a perpetual lie, and the laudable profession of systematic hypocrisy. The character of Lady Teazle is not well made out by the author, nor has it been well represented on the stage since the time of Miss Farren. The 'Rivals' is a play of even more action and incident, but of less wit and satire than the 'School for Scandal.' It is as good as a novel in the reading, and has the broadest and most palpable effect on the stage. If Joseph Surface and Charles have a smack of Tom Jones and Blifil in their moral constitution, Sir Anthony Absolute and Mrs. Malaprop remind us of honest Matthew Bramble and his sister Tabitha in their tempers and dialect. Acres is a distant descendant of Sir Andrew Ague-cheek. It must be confessed of this author, as Falstaff says of some one, that "he had damnable iteration in him!" [The 'Rivals' is one of the most agreeable comedies we have. In the elegance and brilliancy

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of the dialogue, in a certain animation of moral sentiment, and in the masterly *denouement* of the fable, the 'School for Scandal' is superior; but the 'Rivals' has more life and action in it, and abounds in a greater number of whimsical characters, unexpected incidents, and absurd contrasts of situation. The effect of the 'School for Scandal' is something like reading a collection of epigrams, that of the 'Rivals' is more like reading a novel. In the first you are always at the toilette or in the drawing-room; in the last you pass into the open air, and take a turn in King's Mead. The interest is kept alive in the one play by smart repartees, in the other by startling rencontres; in the one we laugh at the satirical descriptions of the speakers, in the other the situation of their persons on the stage is irresistibly ludicrous. Thus the interviews between Lucy and Sir Lucius O'Trigger, between Acres and his friend Jack, who is at once his confidant and his rival; between Mrs. Malaprop and the lover of her niece as Captain Absolute, and between that young lady and the same person as the pretended Ensign Beverley, tell from the mere *double entendre* of the scene, and from the ignorance of the parties of one another's persons and designs. There is no source of dramatic effect more complete than this species of practical satire, (in which our author seems to have been an adept,) where one character in the piece is made a fool of and turned into ridicule to his face, by the very person he is trying to overreach.

There is scarcely a more delightful play than the 'Rivals' when it is well acted, or one that goes off more indifferently when it is not. The humour is of so broad and farcical a kind, that if not thoroughly entered into and carried off by the tone and manner of the performers it fails of effect from its obtrusiveness, and becomes flat from eccentricity. The absurdities brought foward are of that artificial, affected, and preposterous description, that we in some measure require to have the evidence of our senses to see the persons themselves "jetting under the advanced plumes of their folly," before we can entirely believe in their existence or derive pleasure from their exposure. If the extravagance of the poet's conception is not supported by the downright reality of the representation, our credulity is staggered and falls to the ground.

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For instance, Acres should be as odd a compound in external appearance as he is of the author's brain. He must look like a very notable mixture of the lively coxcomb and the blundering blockhead, to reconcile us to his continued impertinence and senseless flippancy. Acres is a mere conventional character, a gay, fluttering automaton, constructed upon mechanical principles, and pushed, as it were, by the logic of wit and a strict keeping in the pursuit of the ridiculous, into follies and fopperies which his natural thoughtlessness would never have dreamt of. Acres does not say or do what such a half-witted young gentleman would say or do of his own head, but what he might be led to do or say with such a prompter as Sheridan at his elbow to tutor him in absurdity—to make a butt of him first, and laugh at him afterwards. Thus his presence of mind in persisting in his allegorical swearing, "Odds triggers and flints,' in the duel scene, when he is trembling all over with cowardice, is quite out of character, but it keeps up the preconcerted jest. In proportion, therefore, as the author has over-done the part, it calls for a greater effort of animal spirits, and a peculiar aptitude of genius in the actor to go through with it, to humour the extravagance, and to seem to take a real and cordial delight in caricaturing himself. Dodd was the only actor we remember who realized this ideal combination of volatility and phlegm, of slowness of understanding with levity of purpose, of vacancy of thought and vivacity of gesture. Acres's affected phrases and apish manners used to sit upon this inimitable actor with the same sort of bumpkin grace and conscious self-complacency as the new cut of his clothes. In general, this character is made little of on the stage; and when left to shift for itself, seems as vapid as it is forced.

Mrs. Malaprop is another portrait of the same over-charged description. The chief drollery of this extraordinary personage consists in her unaccountable and systematic misapplication of hard words. How she should know the words, and not their meaning, is a little odd. In reading the play we are amused with such a series of ridiculous blunders, just as we are with a series of puns or cross-readings. But to keep up the farce upon the stage, besides "a nice arrangement of epitaphs,"

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the imagination must have the assistance of a stately array of grave pretensions, and a most formidable establishment of countenance, with all the vulgar self-sufficiency of pride and ignorance, before it can give full credit to this learned tissue of technical absurdity.

As to Miss Lydia Languish, she is not easily done to the life. She is a delightful compound of extravagance and *naïveté*. She is fond and froward, practical and chimerical, hot and cold in a breath. She is that kind of fruit which drops into the mouth before it is ripe. She must have a husband, but she will not have one without an elopement. This young lady is at an age and of a disposition to throw herself into the arms of the first handsome young fellow she meets; but she repents and grows sullen, like a spoiled child, when she finds that nobody hinders her. She should have all the physiognomical marks of a true boarding-school, novel-reading Miss about her, and some others into the bargain. Sir Anthony's description hardly comes up to the truth. She should have large, rolling eyes; pouting, disdainful lips; a pale, clear complexion; an oval chin, an arching neck, and a profusion of dark ringlets falling down upon it, or she will never answer to our ideas of the charming sentimental hoyden, who is the heroine of the play.

Faulkland is a refined study of a very common disagreeable character, actuated by an unceasing spirit of contradiction, who perversely seizes every idle pretext for making himself and others miserable; or querulous enthusiast, determined on disappointment, and enamoured with suspicion. He is without excuse; nor is it without some difficulty that we endure his self-tormenting follies, through our partiality for Julia, the amiable, unresisting victim of his gloomy caprice.

Sir Anthony Absolute and his son are the most sterling characters of the play. The tetchy, positive, impatient, overbearing, but warm and generous character of the one, and the gallant, determined spirit, adroit address, and dry humour of the other, are admirably set off against each other. The two scenes in which they contend about the proposed match, in the first of which the indignant lover is as choleric and rash as the old

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gentleman is furious and obstinate, and in the latter of which the son affects such a cool indifference and dutiful submission to his father, from having found out that it is the mistress of his choice whom he is to be compelled to marry, are master-pieces both of wit, humour, and character. Sir Anthony Absolute is an evident copy after Smollett's kind-hearted, high-spirited Matthew Bramble, as Mrs. Malaprop is after the redoubted linguist, Mrs. Tabitha Bramble; and, indeed, the whole tone, as well as the local scenery of the 'Rivals,' reminds the reader of 'Humphrey Clinker.' Sheridan had a right to borrow; and he made use of this privilege, not sparingly, both in this and in his other plays. His Acres, as well in the general character as in particular scenes, is a *mannered* imitation of Sir Andrew Ague-cheek.

Fag, Lucy, and Sir Lucius O'Trigger, though subordinate agents in the plot of the 'Rivals,' are not the less amusing on that account. Fag wears his master's wit, as he does his lace, at second-hand; Lucy is an edifying specimen of simplicity in a chamber-maid, and Sir Lucius is an honest fortune-hunting Hibernian, who means well to himself, and no harm to anybody else. They are also traditional characters, common to the stage; but they are drawn with all the life and spirit of originals.

This appears, indeed, to have been the peculiar forte and the great praise of our author's genius, that he could imitate with the spirit of an inventor. There is hardly a character, we believe, or a marked situation in any of his works, of which there are not distinct traces to be found in his predecessors. But though the ground-work and texture of his materials was little more than what he found already existing in the models of acknowledged excellence, yet he constantly varied or improved upon their suggestions with masterly skill and ingenuity. He applied what he thus borrowed, with a sparkling effect and rare felicity, to different circumstances, and adapted it with peculiar elegance to the prevailing taste of the age. He was the farthest possible from a servile plagiarist. He wrote in imitation of Congreve, Vanbrugh, or Wycherley, as those persons would have written in continuation of themselves, had they lived at the same time with him. There is no excellence of former writers of which he has not availed himself, and which he has not con-

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verted to his own purposes, with equal spirit and success. He had great acuteness and knowledge of the world; and if he did not create his own characters, he compared them with their prototypes in nature, and understood their bearings and qualities, before he undertook to make a different use of them. He had wit, fancy, sentiment at command, enabling him to place the thoughts of others in new lights of his own, which reflected back an added lustre on the originals: whatever he touched, he adorned with all the ease, grace, and brilliancy of his style. If he ranks only as a man of second-rate genius, he was assuredly a man of first-rate talents. He was the most classical and the most popular dramatic writer of his age. The works he has left behind him will remain as monuments of his fame, for the delight and instruction of posterity.

Mr. Sheridan not only excelled as a comic writer, but was also an eminent orator, and a disinterested patriot. As a public speaker, he was distinguished by acuteness of observation and pointed wit, more than by impassioned eloquence, or powerful and comprehensive reasoning. Considering him with reference to his conversational talents, his merits as a comic writer, and as a political character, he was perhaps the most accomplished person of his time.

"Take him for all in all,
We shall not look upon his like again."]

The 'Duenna' is a perfect work of art. It has the utmost sweetness and point. The plot, the characters, the dialogue, are all complete in themselves, and they are all his own; and the songs are the best that ever were written, except those in the 'Beggars' Opera.' They have a joyous spirit of intoxication in them, and a strain of the most melting tenderness Compare the softness of that beginning,

"Had I heart for falsehood framed,"

with the spirited defiance to Fortune in the lines,

"Half thy malice youth could bear,
And the rest a bumper drown."

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It would have been too much for the author of these elegant and classic productions not to have had some drawbacks on his felicity and fame. But even the applause of nations and the favour of princes cannot always be enjoyed with impunity. Sheridan was not only an excellent dramatic writer, but a first-rate parliamentary speaker, and a disinterested patriot. His characteristics as an orator were manly, unperverted good sense, and keen irony. Wit, which has been thought a two-edged weapon, was by him always employed on the same side of the question—I think, on the right one. His set and more laboured speeches, as that on the Begum's affairs, were proportionably abortive and unimpressive; but no one was equal to him in replying, on the spur of the moment, to pompous absurdity, and unravelling the web of flimsy sophistry. He was the last accomplished debater of the House of Commons. His character will, however, soon be drawn by one who has all the ability, and every inclination to do him justice; who knows how to bestow praise and to deserve it; by one who is himself an ornament of private and of public life; a satirist, beloved by his friends; a wit and a patriot to boot; a poet, and an honest man.

Macklin's 'Man of the World' has one powerfully written character, that of Sir Pertinax Macsycophant, but it required Cooke's acting to make it thoroughly effectual.

Mr. Holcroft, in his 'Road to Ruin,' set the example of that style of comedy, in which the *slang* phrases of jockey-noblemen and the humours of the four-in-hand club are blended with the romantic sentiments of distressed damsels and philosophic waiting-maids, and in which he has been imitated by the most successful of our living writers, unless we make a separate class for the school of Cumberland, who was almost entirely devoted to the *comedie larmoyante*, and who, passing from the light, volatile spirit of his 'West Indian,' to the mawkish sensibility of the 'Wheel of Fortune,' linked the Muse of English comedy to the genius of German tragedy, where she has since remained, like Christobel fallen asleep in the Witch's arms, and where I shall leave her, as I have not the poet's privilege to break the spell. [As to The 'West Indian' it is a play that from the time of its

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first appearing has continued to hold possession of the stage, with just enough merit to keep it there, and no striking faults to drive it thence. It is above mediocrity. There is an agreeable vein of good humour and animal spirits running through it that does not suffer it to sink into downright insipidity, nor ever excites any very high degree of interest or delight. Wit there is none, and hardly an attempt at humour, except in the character of Major O'Flaherty, who would not be recognized as a genuine Irishman but by virtue of his representative on the stage. His blunders and conduct are not such as would proceed from the good-natured unthinking impetuosity of such a person as O'Flaherty is intended to be: but they are such as the author might sit down and try to invent for him. It is not an Irish character, but a character playing the Irishman; not a hasty, warm-hearted, hair-brained fellow, stumbling on mistakes by accident either in his words or actions, but a very complaisant gentleman, looking out for them by design, to humour the opinion which you entertain of him, and who is to make himself a national butt for the audience to laugh at. The 'West Indian' himself (Belcour) is certainly the support of the piece. There is something interesting in the idea of seeing a young fellow of high animal spirits, a handsome fortune, and considerable generosity of feeling, launched from the other side of the world (with the additional impetus that the distance would give him) to run the gauntlet of the follies and vices of the town, to fall into scrapes only to get out of them, and who is full of professions of attachment to virtues which he does not practise, and of repentance for offences which he has not committed. It is the same character as Charles Surface in the 'School for Scandal' with an infusion of the romantic from his transatlantic origin, and an additional excuse for his extravagances in the tropical temperature of his blood.

The language of this play is elegant but common-place: the speakers seem in general more intent on adjusting their periods than on settling their affairs. The sentiments aspire to liberality. They are amiably mawkish, and as often as they incline to paradox, have a rapid sort of petulance about them, which excites neither our sympathy nor our esteem. The plot is a good

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plot. It is well laid, decently distributed through the course of five acts, and wound up at last to its final catastrophe in a single sentence.]

There are two other writers whom I have omitted to mention, but not forgotten: they are our two immortal farce-writers, the authors of the 'Mayor of Garratt' and the 'Agreeable Surprise.' If Foote has been called our English Aristophanes, O'Keefe might well be called our English Moliere. The scale of the modern writer was smaller, but the spirit is the same. In light, careless laughter, and pleasant exaggerations of the humorous, we have had no one equal to him. There is no labour or contrivance in his scenes, but the drollery of his subject seems to strike irresistibly upon his fancy, and run away with his discretion as it does with ours. His 'Cowslip' and 'Lingo' are 'Touchstone' and 'Audry' revived. He is himself a modern antique. His fancy has all the quaintness and extravagance of the old writers, with the ease and lightness which the moderns arrogate to themselves. All his pieces are delightful, but the 'Agreeable Surprise' is the most so. There are in this some of the most irresistible *double entendres*, the most felicitous blunders in situation and character, that can be conceived; and in Lingo's superb replication, "A scholar! I was a master of scholars," he has hit the height of the ridiculous. Foote had more dry, sarcastic humour, and more knowledge of the world. His farces are bitter satires, more or less personal, as it happened. Mother Cole, in the 'Minor,' and Mr. Smirk the Auctioneer, in 'Taste,' with their coadjutors, are rich cut-and-come-again, "pleasant, though wrong." But the 'Mayor of Garratt' is his *magnum opus* in this line. Some comedies are long farces: this farce is a comedy in little. It is also one of the best acted farces that we have. The acting of Dowton and Russell, in Major Sturgeon and Jerry Sneak, cannot be too much praised; Foote himself would have been satisfied with it. The strut, the bluster, the hollow swaggering, and turkey-cock swell of the Major; and Jerry's meekness, meanness, folly, good-nature, and hen-pecked air, are assuredly done to the life. The latter character is even better than the former, which is saying a bold word. Dowton's art is only an imitation of art, of an affected

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or an assumed character; but in Russell's Jerry you see the very soul of nature, in a fellow that is "pigeon-livered and lacks gall," laid open and anatomized. You can see that his heart is no bigger than a pin, and his head is as soft as a pippin. His whole aspect is chilled and frightened, as if he had been dipped in a pond; and yet he looks as if he would like to be snug and comfortable if he durst. He smiles as if he would be friends with you upon any terms, and the tears come in his eyes because you will not let him. The tones of his voice are prophetic as the cuckoo's under-song. His words are made of water-gruel. The scene in which he tries to make a confidant of the Major is great; and his song of 'Robinson Crusoe' as melancholy as the island itself. The reconciliation-scene with his wife, and his exclamation over her, "to think that I should make my Molly *weep!*" are pathetic, if the last stage of human infirmity is so. This farce appears to me to be both moral and entertaining; yet it does not take. It is considered as an unjust satire on the city, and the country at large; and there is a very frequent repetition of the word "nonsense" in the house, during the performance. Mr. Dowton was even hissed, either from the upper boxes or gallery, in his speech recounting the marching of his corps "from Brentford to Ealing, and from Ealing to Acton;" and several persons in the pit, who thought the whole *low*, were for going out. This shows well for the progress of civilization. I suppose the manners described in the 'Mayor of Garratt' have, in the last forty years, become obsolete, and the characters ideal: we have no longer either hen-pecked or brutal husbands, or domineering wives; the Miss Molly Jollops no longer wed Jerry Sneaks, or admire the brave Major Sturgeons on the other side of Temple bar; all our soldiers have become heroes, and our magistrates respectable, and the farce of life is over.

One more name, and I have done. It is that of Peter Pindar. The historian of 'Sir Joseph Banks' and the 'Emperor of Morocco,' of the 'Pilgrims and the Peas,' of the 'Royal Academy,' and of 'Mr. Whitbread's brewing-vat,' the bard in whom the nation and the king delighted, is old and blind, but still merry and wise;—remembering how he has made the

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world laugh in his time, and not repenting of the mirth he has given; with an involuntary smile lighted up at the mad pranks of his muse, and the lucky hits of his pen—"faint picture of those flashes of his spirit, that were wont to set the table in a roar;" like his own expiring taper, bright and fitful to the last; tagging a rhyme or conning his own epitaph; and waiting for the last summons, grateful and contented!

I have thus gone through the history of that part of our literature which I had proposed to myself to treat of. I have only to add, by way of explanation, that in some few parts I had anticipated myself in fugitive or periodical publications; and I thought it better to repeat what I had already stated to the best of my ability, than alter it for the worse. These parts bear, however, a very small proportion to the whole; and I have used such diligence and care as I could, in adding to them whatever appeared necessary to complete the general view of the subject, or make it (as far as lay in my power) interesting to others.

THE END.

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LECTURES

ON

THE ENGLISH POETS.

BY WILLIAM HAZLITT.

FROM THE THIRD LONDON EDITION.

EDITED BY HIS SON.

NEW YORK:
DERBY & JACKSON, 119 NASSAU ST.,
1857.

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TO

BARRY CORNWALL.

WHOM THE AUTHOR OF THESE LECTURES

ESTEEMED AS A MAN

AND

ADMIRED AS A POET,

THIS VOLUME IS DEDICATED.

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LECTURES

ON

THE ENGLISH POETS.

LECTURE I.—INTRODUCTORY.

ON POETRY IN GENERAL.

The best general notion which I can give of poetry is that it is the natural impression of any object or event, by its vividness exciting an involuntary movement of imagination and passion, and producing, by sympathy, a certain modulation of the voice, or sounds, expressing it.

In treating of poetry, I shall speak first of the subject-matter of it, next of the forms of expression to which it gives birth, and afterwards of its connection with harmony of sound.

Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself. He who has a contempt for poetry cannot have much respect for himself, or for anything else. It is not a mere frivolous accomplishment (as some persons have been led to imagine,) the trifling amusement of a few idle readers or leisure hours—it has been the study and delight of mankind in

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all ages. Many people suppose that poetry is something to be found only in books, contained in lines of ten syllables, with like endings: but wherever there is a sense of beauty, or power, or harmony, as in the motion of a wave of the sea, in the growth of a flower, that "spreads its sweet leaves to the air, and dedicates its beauty to the sun,"—*there* is poetry, in its birth. If history is a grave study, poetry may be said to be a graver: its materials lie deeper, and are spread wider. History treats, for the most part, of the cumbrous and unwieldly masses of things, the empty cases in which the affairs of the world are packed, under the heads of intrigue or war, in different states, and from century to century: but there is no thought or feeling that can have entered into the mind of man, which he would be eager to communicate to others, or which they would listen to with delight, that is not a fit subject for poetry. It is not a branch of authorship: it is "the stuff of which our life is made." The rest is "mere oblivion," a dead letter: for all that is worth remembering in life is the poetry of it. Fear is poetry, hope is poetry, love is poetry, hatred is poetry; contempt, jealousy, remorse, admiration, wonder, pity, despair, or madness, are all poetry. Poetry is that fine particle within us that expands, rarefies, refines, raises our whole being: without it "man's life is poor as beasts'" Man is a poetical animal: and those of us who do not study the principles of poetry act upon them all our lives, like Moliere's *Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, who had always spoken prose without knowing it. The child is a poet, in fact, when he first plays at hide-and-seek, or repeats the story of Jack the Giant-killer; the shepherd-boy is a poet, when he first crowns his mistress with a garland of flowers; the countryman, when he stops to look at the rainbow; the city-apprentice, when he gazes after the Lord-Mayor's show; the miser, when he hugs his gold; the courtier, who builds his hopes upon a smile; the savage, who paints his idol with blood; the slave, who worships a tyrant, or the tyrant, who fancies himself a god;—the vain, the ambitious, the proud, the choleric man, the hero and the coward, the beggar and the king, the rich and the poor, the young and the old, all live in a world of their own making; and the poet does no more than describe what all the others

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think and act. If his art is folly and madness, it is folly and madness at second hand. "There is warrant for it." Poets alone have not "such seething brains, such shaping fantasies, that apprehend more than cooler reason" can.

> "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet,
> Are of imagination all compact.
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
> The madman. While the lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heav'n to earth, from earth to heav'n;
> And, as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
> Such tricks hath strong imagination."

If poetry is a dream, the business of life is much the same. If it is a fiction, made up of what we wish things to be, and fancy that they are, because we wish them so, there is no other nor better reality. Ariosto has described the loves of Angelica and Medoro: but was not Medoro, who carved the name of his mistress on the barks of trees, as much enamoured of her charms as he? Homer has celebrated the anger of Achilles: but was not the hero as mad as the poet? Plato banished the poets from his Commonwealth, lest their descriptions of the natural man should spoil his mathematical man, who was to be without passions and affections, who was neither to laugh nor weep, to feel sorrow nor anger, to be cast down nor elated by anything. This was a chimera, however, which never existed but in the brain of the inventor; and Homer's poetical world has outlived Plato's philosophical Republic.

Poetry then is an imitation of nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man's nature. We shape things according to our wishes and fancies, without poetry; but poetry is the most emphatical language that can be found for those creations of the mind "which ecstasy is very cunning in." Neither a mere description of natural objects, nor a mere delineation of natural feelings, however distinct or forcible, constitutes the ul-

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timate end and aim of poetry, without the heightenings of the imagination. The light of poetry is not only a direct but also a reflected light, that, while it shews us the object, throws a sparkling radiance on all around it: the flame of the passions, communicated to the imagination, reveals to us, as with a flash of lightning, the inmost recesses of thought, and penetrates our whole being. Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms; feelings, as they suggest forms or other feelings. Poetry puts a spirit of life and motion into the universe. It describes the flowing, not the fixed. It does not define the limits of sense, nor analyze the distinctions of the understanding, but signifies the excess of the imagination beyond the actual or ordinary impression of any object or feeling. The poetical impression of any object is that uneasy, exquisite sense of beauty or power that cannot be contained within itself; that is impatient of all limit; that (as flame bends to flame) strives to link itself to some other image of kindred beauty or grandeur; to enshrine itself, as it were, in the highest forms of fancy, and to relieve the aching sense of pleasure by expressing it in the boldest manner, and by the most striking examples of the same quality in other instances. Poetry, according to Lord Bacon, for this reason, "has something divine in it, because it raises the mind and hurries it into sublimity, by conforming the shows of things to the desires of the soul, instead of subjecting the soul to external things as reason and history do." It is strictly the language of the imagination; and the imagination is that faculty which represents objects, not as they are in themselves, but as they are moulded, by other thoughts and feelings, into an infinite variety of shapes and combinations of power. This language is not the less true to nature because it is false in point of fact; but so much the more true and natural, if it conveys the impression which the object under the influence of passion makes on the mind. Let an object, for instance, be presented to the senses in a state of agitation or fear—and the imagination will distort or magnify the object, and convert it into the likeness of whatever is most proper to encourage the fear. "Our eyes are made the fools" of our other faculties. This is the universal law of the imagination,

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"That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy:
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is each bush suppos'd a bear!"

Wher. Iachimo says of Imogen,

"——— The flame o' th' taper
Bows toward her, and would under-peep her lids
To see the enclosed lights"—

this passionate interpretation of the motion of the flame to accord with the speaker's own feelings is true poetry. The lover, equally with the poet, speaks of the auburn tresses of his mistress as locks of shining gold, because the least tinge of yellow in the hair has, from novelty and a sense of personal beauty, a more lustrous effect to the imagination than the purest gold. We compare a man of gigantic stature to a tower: not that he is anything like so large, but because the excess of his size beyond what we are accustomed to expect, or the usual size of things of the same class, produces by contrast a greater feeling of magnitude and ponderous strength than another object of ten times the same dimensions. The intensity of the feeling makes up for the disproportion of the objects. Things are equal to the imagination, which have the power of affecting the mind with an equal degree of terror, admiration, delight, or love. When Lear calls upon the heavens to avenge his cause, "for they are old like him," there is nothing extravagant or impious in this sublime identification of his age with theirs; for there is no other image which could do justice to the agonising sense of his wrongs and his despair!

Poetry is the high-wrought enthusiasm of fancy and feeling. As, in describing natural objects, it impregnates sensible impressions with the forms of fancy, so it describes the feelings of pleasure or pain, by blending them with the strongest movements of passion, and the most striking forms of nature. Tragic poetry, which is the most impassioned species of it, strives to carry on the feeling to the utmost point of sublimity or pathos, by all the force of comparison or contrast; loses the sense of present suffering in the imaginary exaggeration of it; exhausts the terror or

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pity by an unlimited indulgence of it; grapples with impossibilities in its desperate impatience of restraint; throws us back upon the past, forward into the future; brings every moment of our being or object of nature in startling review before us; and, in the rapid whirl of events, lifts us from the depths of woe to the highest contemplations on human life. When Lear says, of Edgar, "Nothing but his unkind daughters could have brought him to this;" what a bewildered amazement, what a wrench of the imagination, that cannot be brought to conceive of any other cause of misery than that which has bowed it down, and absorbs all other sorrow in its own! His sorrow, like a flood, supplies the sources of all other sorrow. Again, when he exclaims in the mad scene, "The little dogs and all, Tray, Blanche, and Sweetheart, see, they bark at me!" it is passion lending occasion to imagination to make every creature in league against him, conjuring up ingratitude and insult in their least looked-for and most galling shapes, searching every thread and fibre of his heart, and finding out the last remaining image of respect or attachment in the bottom of his breast, only to torture and kill it! In like manner, the "So I am" of Cordelia gushes from her heart like a torrent of tears, relieving it of a weight of love and of supposed ingratitude, which had pressed upon it for years. What a fine return of the passion upon itself is that in Othello—with what a mingled agony of regret and despair he clings to the last traces of departed happiness—when he exclaims,

> ——"Oh now, for ever
> Farewell the tranquil mind. Farewell content;
> Farewell the plumed troops and the big war,
> That make ambition virtue! Oh farewell!
> Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
> The spirit-stirring drum, th' ear-piercing fife,
> The royal banner, and all quality,
> Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war:
> And O, you mortal engines, whose rude throats
> Th' immortal Jove's dread clamours counterfeit,
> Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!"

How his passion lashes itself up and swells and rages like a tide in its sounding course, when, in answer to the doubts expressed of his returning love, he says,

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"Never, Iago. Like to the Pontic sea,
Whose icy current and compulsive course
Ne'er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
To the Propontic and the Hellespont:
Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace,
Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
Till that a capable and wide revenge
Swallow them up."—

The climax of his expostulation afterwards with Desdemona is at that line,

"But there, where I had garner'd up my heart,
To be discarded thence!"

One mode in which the dramatic exhibition of passion excites our sympathy without raising our disgust is that, in proportion as it sharpens the edge of calamity and disappointment, it strengthens the desire of good. It enhances our consciousness of the blessing, by making us sensible of the magnitude of the loss. The storm of passion lays bare and shews us the rich depths of the human soul: the whole of our existence, the sum total of our passions and pursuits, of that which we desire, and that which we dread, is brought before us by contrast; the action and re-action are equal; the keenness of immediate suffering only gives us a more intense aspiration after, and a more intimate participation with, the antagonist world of good; makes us drink deeper of the cup of human life; tugs at the heart-strings; loosens the pressure about them; and calls the springs of thought and feeling into play with tenfold force.

Impassioned poetry is an emanation of the moral and intellectual part of our nature, as well as of the sensitive—of the desire to know, the will to act, and the power to feel; and ought to appeal to these different parts of our constitution, in order to be perfect. The domestic or prose tragedy, which is thought to be the most natural, is in this sense the least so, because it appeals almost exclusively to one of these faculties, our sensibility. The tragedies of Moore and Lillo, for this reason, however affecting at the time, oppress and lie like a dead weight upon the mind, a load of misery which it is unable to throw off: the tra-

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gedy of Shakspeare, which is true poetry, stirs our inmost affections; abstracts evil from itself by combining it with all the forms of imagination, and with the deepest workings of the heart, and rouses the whole man within us.

The pleasure, however, derived from tragic poetry is not anything peculiar to it as poetry, as a fictitious and fanciful thing. It is not an anomaly of the imagination. It has its source and ground-work in the common love of strong excitement. As Mr. Burke observes, people flock to see a tragedy; but, if there were a public execution in the next street, the theatre would very soon be empty. It is not then the difference between fiction and reality that solves the difficulty. Children are satisfied with the stories of ghosts and witches in plain prose: nor do the hawkers of full, true, and particular accounts of murders and executions about the streets find it necessary to have them turned into penny ballads, before they can dispose of these interesting and authentic documents. The grave politician drives a thriving trade of abuse and calumnies poured out against those whom he makes his enemies for no other end than that he may live by them. The popular preacher makes less frequent mention of heaven than of hell. Oaths and nicknames are only a more vulgar sort of poetry or rhetoric. We are as fond of indulging our violent passions as of reading a description of those of others. We are as prone to make a torment of our fears as to luxuriate in our hopes of good. If it be asked, Why we do so? the best answer will be, Because we cannot help it. The sense of power is as strong a principle in the mind as the love of pleasure. Objects of terror and pity exercise the same despotic control over it as those of love or beauty. It is as natural to hate as to love, to despise as to admire, to express our hatred or contempt, as our love or admiration.

> "Masterless passion sways us to the mood
> Of what it likes or loathes."

Not that we like what we loathe; but we like to indulge our hatred and scorn of it; to dwell upon it, to exasperate our idea of it by every refinement of ingenuity and extravagance of illustration; to make it a bugbear to ourselves, to point it out to oth-

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ers in all the splendour of deformity, to embody it to the senses, to stigmatise it by name, to grapple with it in thought, in action, to sharpen our intellect, to arm our will against it, to know the worst we have to contend with, and to contend with it to the utmost. Poetry is only the highest eloquence of passion, the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of any thing, whether pleasurable or painful, mean or dignified, delightful or distressing. It is the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feeling we have, and of which we cannot get rid in any other way, that gives an instant "satisfaction to the thought." This is equally the origin of wit and fancy, of comedy and tragedy, of the sublime and pathetic. When Pope says of the Lord Mayor's shew,—

> "Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
> But lives in Settle's numbers one day more;"

—when Collins makes Danger, "with limbs of giant mould,"

> ——"Throw him on the steep
> Of some loose hanging rock asleep;"

when Lear calls out, in extreme anguish,

> "Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend,
> How much more hideous shew'st thou in a child
> Than the sea-monster!—"

—the passion of contempt in the one case, of terror in the other, and of indignation in the last, is perfectly satisfied. We see the thing ourselves, and shew it to others as we feel it to exist, and as, in spite of ourselves, we are compelled to think of it. The imagination, by thus embodying and turning them to shape, gives an obvious relief to the indistinct and importunate cravings of the will.—We do not wish the thing to be so; but we wish it to appear such as it is. For knowledge is conscious power; and the mind is no longer, in this case, the dupe, though it may be the victim, of vice or folly.

Poetry is, in all its shapes, the language of the imagination and the passions, of fancy and will. Nothing, therefore, can be

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more absurd than the outcry which has been sometimes raised by frigid and pedantic critics, for reducing the language of poetry to the standard of common sense and reason: for the end and use of poetry, both at the first and now, was and is "to hold the mirror up to nature," seen through the medium of passion and imagination, not divested of that medium by means of literal truth or abstract reason. The painter of history might as well be required to represent the face of a person who has just trod upon a serpent with the still-life expression of a common portrait, as the poet to describe the most striking and vivid impressions which things can be supposed to make upon the mind in the language of common conversation. Let who will strip nature of the colours and the shapes of fancy, the poet is not bound to do so; the impressions of common sense and strong imagination, that is, of passion and indifference, cannot be the same, and they must have a separate language to do justice to either. Objects must strike differently upon the mind, independently of what they are in themselves, as long as we have a different interest in them, as we see them in a different point of view, nearer or at a greater distance (morally or physically speaking) from novelty, from old acquaintance, from our ignorance of them, from our fear of their consequences, from contrast, from unexpected likeness. We can no more take away the faculty of the imagination than we can see all objects without light or shade. Some things must dazzle us by their preternatural light; others must hold us in suspense, and tempt our curiosity to explore their obscurity. Those who would dispel these various illusions, to give us their drab-coloured creation in their stead, are not very wise Let the naturalist, if he will, catch the glow-worm, carry it home with him in a box, and find it next morning nothing but a little gray worm; let the poet or the lover of poetry visit it at evening, when beneath the scented hawthorn and the crescent moon it has built itself a palace of emerald light. This is also one part of nature, one appearance which the glow-worm presents, and that not the least interesting; so poetry is one part of the history of the human mind, though it is neither science nor philosophy. It cannot be concealed, however, that the progress of knowledge and

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refinement has a tendency to circumscribe the limits of the imagination, and to clip the wings of poetry. The province of the imagination is principally visionary, the unknown and undefined: the understanding restores things to their natural boundaries, and strips them of their fanciful pretensions. Hence the history of religious and poetical enthusiasm is much the same; and both have received a sensible shock from the progress of experimental philosophy. It is the undefined and uncommon that gives birth and scope to the imagination; we can only fancy what we do not know. As in looking into the mazes of a tangled wood we fill them with what shapes we please, with ravenous beasts, with caverns vast, and drear enchantments, so, in our ignorance of the world about us, we make gods or devils of the first objects we see, and set no bounds to the wilful suggestions of our hopes and fears.

> "And visions, as poetic eyes avow,
> Hang on each leaf, and cling to every bough."

There can never be another Jacob's dream. Since that time the heavens have gone farther off, and grown astronomical. They have become averse to the imagination, nor will they return to us on the squares of the distances, or on Doctor Chalmers's Discourses. Rembrant's picture brings the matter nearer to us.—It is not only the progress of mechanical knowledge, but the necessary advances of civilization, that are unfavourable to the spirit of poetry. We not only stand in less awe of the preternatural world, but we can calculate more surely, and look with more indifference, upon the regular routine of this. The heroes of the fabulous ages rid the world of monsters and giants. At present we are less exposed to the vicissitudes of good or evil, to the incursions of wild beasts or "bandit fierce," or to the unmitigated fury of the elements. The time has been that "our fell of hair would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir as life were in it." But the police spoils all; and we now hardly so much as dream of a midnight murder. Macbeth is only tolerated in this country for the sake of the music; and in the United States of America, where the philosophical principles of government are carried still farther in theory and practice, we find that the

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Beggars' Opera is hooted from the stage. Society, by degrees, is constructed into a machine that carries us safely and insipidly from one end of life to the other, in a very comfortable prose style.

> "Obscurity her curtain round them drew,
> And siren Sloth a dull quietus sung."

The remarks which have been here made would, in some measure, lead to a solution of the question of the comparative merits of painting and poetry. I do not mean to give any preference, but it should seem that the argument, which has been sometimes set up, that painting must affect the imagination more strongly, because it represents the image more distinctly, is not well founded. We may assume, without much temerity, that poetry is more poetical than painting. When artists or connoisseurs talk on stilts about the poetry of painting, they show that they know little about poetry, and have little love for the art. Painting gives the object itself; poetry what it implies. Painting embodies what a thing contains in itself: poetry suggests what exists out of it, in any manner connected with it. But this last is the proper province of the imagination. Again, as it relates to passion, painting gives the event, poetry the progress of events: but it is during the progress, in the interval of expectation and suspense, while our hopes and fears are strained to the highest pitch of breathless agony, that the pinch of the interest lies.

> "Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or hideous dream.
> The mortal instruments are then in council;
> And the state of man, like to a little kingdom,
> Suffers then the nature of an insurrection."

But by the time that the picture is painted, all is over. Faces are the best part of a picture; but even faces are not what we chiefly remember in what interests us most.—But it may be asked then, Is there anything better than Claude Lorraine's landscapes, than Titian's portraits, than Raphael's Cartoons, or the Greek statues? Of the two first I shall say nothing, as they

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are evidently picturesque, rather than imaginative. Raphael's Cartoons are certainly the finest comments that ever were made on the Scriptures. Would their effect be the same if we were not acquainted with the text? But the New Testament existed before the cartoons. There is one subject of which there is no cartoon, Christ washing the feet of the disciples the night before his death. But that chapter does not need a commentary! It is for want of some such resting-place for the imagination that the Greek statues are little else than specious forms. They are marble to the touch and to the heart. They have not an informing principle within them. In their faultless excellence they appear sufficient to themselves. By their beauty they are raised above the frailties of passion or suffering. By their beauty they are deified. But they are not objects of religious faith to us, and their forms are a reproach to common humanity. They seem to have no sympathy with us, and not to want our admiration.

Poetry in its matter and form is natural imagery or feeling, combined with passion and fancy. In its mode of conveyance, it combines the ordinary use of language with musical expression. There is a question of long standing, in what the essence of poetry consists; or what it is that determines why one set of ideas should be expressed in prose, another in verse. Milton has told us his idea of poetry in a single line:—

> "Thoughts that voluntary move
> Harmonious numbers."

As there are certain sounds that excite certain movements, and the song and dance go together, so there are, no doubt, certain thoughts that lead to certain tones of voice, or modulations of sound, and change "the words of Mercury into the songs of Apollo." There is a striking instance of this adaptation of the movement of sound and rhythm to the subject, in Spenser's description of the Satyrs accompanying Una to the cave of Sylvanus.

> "So from the ground she fearless doth arise,
> And walketh forth without suspect of crime.
> They, all as glad as birds of joyous prime,

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Thence lead her forth, about her dancing round,
Shouting and singing all a shepherd's rhyme;
And with green branches strewing all the ground,
Do worship her as queen with olive garland crown'd.
And all the way their merry pipes they sound,
That all the woods and doubled echoes ring;
And with their horned feet do wear the ground,
Leaping like wanton kids in pleasant spring;
So towards old Sylvanus they her bring,
Who, with the noise awaked, cometh out."

Faery Queen, b. i. c. vi.

On the contrary, there is nothing either musical or natural in the ordinary construction of language. It is a thing altogether arbitrary and conventional. Neither in the sounds themselves, which are the voluntary signs of certain ideas, nor in their grammatical arrangements in common speech, is there any principle of natural imitation, or correspondence to the individual ideas, or to the tone of feeling with which they are conveyed to others, The jerks, the breaks, the inequalities, and harshnesses of prose, are fatal to the flow of a poetical imagination, as a jolting road or a stumbling horse disturbs the reverie of an absent man. But poetry makes these odds all even. It is the music of language, answering to the music of the mind, untying, as it were, "the secret soul of harmony." Wherever any object takes such a hold of the mind as to make us dwell upon it, and brood over it, melting the heart in tenderness, or kindling it to a sentiment of enthusiasm;—wherever a movement of imagination or passion is impressed on the mind, by which it seeks to prolong and repeat the emotion, to bring all other objects into accord with it, and to give the same movement of harmony, sustained and continuous, or gradually varied according to the occasion, to the sounds that express it—this is poetry. The musical in sound is the sustained and continuous; the musical in thought is the sustained and continuous also. There is a near connection between music and deep-rooted passion. Mad people sing. As often as articulation passes naturally into intonation there poetry begins. Where one idea gives a tone and colour to others, where one feeling melts others into it, there can be no reason why the same principle should not be extended to the sounds by which the

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voice utters these emotions of the soul, and blends syllables and lines into each other. It is to supply the inherent defect of harmony in the customary mechanism of language, to make the sound an echo to the sense, when the sense becomes a sort of echo to itself—to mingle the tide of verse, "the golden cadences of poetry," with the tide of feeling, flowing and murmuring as it flows—in short, to take the language of the imagination from off the ground, and enable it to spread its wings where it may indulge its own impulses—

> "Sailing with supreme dominion
> Through the azure deep of air—"

without being stopped, or fretted, or diverted with the abruptnesses and petty obstacles, and discordant flats and sharps of prose, that poetry was invented. It is to common language what springs are to a carriage, or wings to feet. In ordinary speech we arrive at a certain harmony by the modulations of the voice: in poetry the same thing is done systematically by a regular collocation of syllables. It has been well observed, that every one who declaims warmly, or grows intent upon a subject, rises into a sort of blank verse or measured prose. The merchant, as described in Chaucer, went on his way "sounding always the increase of his winning." Every prose-writer has more or less of rhythmical adaptation, except poets, who, when deprived of the regular mechanism of verse, seem to have no principle of modulation left in their writings.

An excuse might be made for rhyme in the same manner. It is but fair that the ear should linger on the sounds that delight it, or avail itself of the same brilliant coincidence and unexpected recurrence of syllables, that have been displayed in the invention and collocation of images. It is allowed that rhyme assists the memory; and a man of wit and shrewdness has been heard to say that the only four good lines of poetry are the well-known ones which tell the number of days in the months of the year.

> "Thirty days hath September," &c.

But if the jingle of names assists the memory, may it not also quicken the fancy? and there are other things worth having at

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our fingers' ends besides the contents of the almanac.—Pope's versification is tiresome, from its excessive sweetness and uniformity. Shakspeare's blank verse is the perfection of dramatic dialogue.

All is not poetry that passes for such: nor does verse make the whole difference between poetry and prose. The Iliad does not cease to be poetry in a literal translation; and Addison's Campaign has been very properly denominated a Gazette in rhyme. Common prose differs from poetry, as treating for the most part either of such trite, familiar, and irksome matters of fact as convey no extraordinary impulse to the imagination, or else of such difficult and laborious processes of the understanding as do not admit of the wayward or violent movements either of the imagination or the passions.

I will mention three works which come as near to poetry as possible without absolutely being so, namely, the Pilgrim's Progress, Robinson Crusoe, and the Tales of Boccaccio. Chaucer and Dryden have translated some of the last into English rhyme, but the essence and the power of poetry was there before. That which lifts the spirit above the earth, which draws the soul out of itself with indescribable longings, is poetry in kind, and generally fit to become so in name, by being "married to immortal verse." If it is of the essence of poetry to strike and fix the imagination, whether we will or no, to make the eye of childhood glisten with the starting tear, to be never thought of afterwards with indifference, John Bunyan and Daniel Defoe may be permitted to pass for poets in their way. The mixture of fancy and reality in the Pilgrim's Progress was never equalled in any allegory. His pilgrims walk above the earth, and yet are on it. What zeal, what beauty, what truth of fiction! What deep feeling in the description of Christian's swimming across the water at last, and in the picture of the Shining Ones within the gates, with wings at their backs and garlands on their heads, who are to wipe all tears from his eyes! The writer's genius, though not "dipped in dews of Castalie," was baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The prints in this book are no small part of it. If the confinement of Philoctetes in the island of Lemnos was a subject for the most beautiful of all the Greek

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tragedies, what shall we say to Robinson Crusoe in his? Take the speech of the Greek hero on leaving his cave, beautiful as it is, and compare it with the reflections of the English adventurer in his solitary place of confinement. The thoughts of home, and of all from which he is for ever cut off, swell and press against his bosom, as the heaving ocean rolls its ceaseless tide against the rocky shore, and the very beatings of his heart become audible in the eternal silence that surrounds him. Thus he says:

"As I walked about, either in my hunting, or for viewing the country, the anguish of my soul at my condition would break out upon me on a sudden, and my very heart would die within me to think of the woods, the mountains, the deserts I was in; and how I was a prisoner, locked up with the eternal bars and bolts of the ocean, in an uninhabited wilderness, without redemption. In the midst of the greatest composures of my mind, this would break out upon me like a storm, and make me wring my hands, and weep like a child. Sometimes it would take me in the middle of my work, and I would immediately sit down and sigh, and look upon the ground for an hour or two together, and this was still worse to me, for if I could burst into tears or vent myself in words, it would go off, and the grief, having exhausted itself, would abate."

The story of his adventures would not make a poem like the Odyssey, it is true, but the relator had the true genius of a poet. It has been made a question whether Richardson's romances are poetry; and the answer, perhaps, is that they are not poetry, because they are not romance. The interest is worked up to an inconceivable height; but it is by an infinite number of little things, by incessant labour and calls upon the attention, by a repetition of blows that have no rebound in them. The sympathy excited is not a voluntary contribution, but a tax. Nothing is unforced and spontaneous. There is a want of elasticity and motion. The story does not "give an echo to the seat where love is throned." The heart does not answer of itself like a chord in music. The fancy does not run on before the writer with breathless expectation, but is dragged along with an infinite number of pins and wheels, like those with which the Lilliputians dragged Gulliver pinioned to the royal palace.—Sir Charles Grandison is a coxcomb. What sort of a figure would he cut, translated into an epic poem, by the side of Achilles?

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Clarissa, the divine Clarissa, is too interesting by half. She is interesting in her ruffles, in her gloves, her samplers, her aunts and uncles—she is interesting in all that is uninteresting. Such things, however intensely they may be brought home to us, are not conductors to the imagination. There is infinite truth and feeling in Richardson; but it is extracted from a *caput mortuum* of circumstances: it does not evaporate of itself. His poetical genius is like Ariel confined in a pine-tree, and requires an artificial process to let it out. Shakspeare says—

> "Our poesy is as a gum
> Which issues whence 'tis nourished, our gentle flame
> Provokes itself, and, like the current, flies
> Each bound it chafes."*

I shall conclude this general account with some remarks on four of the principal works of poetry in the world, at different periods of history—Homer, the Bible, Dante, and, let me add, Ossian. In Homer, the principle of action or life is predominant; in the Bible, the principle of faith and the idea of Providence; Dante is a personification of blind will; and in Ossian we see the decay of life, and the fag end of the world. Homer's poetry is the heroic: it is full of life and action: it is bright as the day, strong as a river. In the vigour of his intellect, he grapples with all the objects of nature, and enters into all the relations of social life. He saw many countries, and the manners of many men; and he has brought them all together in his poem. He describes his heroes going to battle with a prodigality of life, arising from an exuberance of animal spirits; we see

* Burke's writings are not poetry, notwithstanding the vividness of the fancy, because the subject matter is abstruse and dry, not natural, but artificial. The difference between poetry and eloquence is that the one is the eloquence of the imagination, and the other of the understanding. Eloquence tries to persuade the will, and convince the reason: poetry produces its effects by instantaneous sympathy. Nothing is a subject for poetry that admits of a dispute. Poets are in general bad prose-writers, because their images, though fine in themselves, are not to the purpose, and do not carry on the argument. The French poetry wants the forms of the imagination. It is didactic more than dramatic. And some of our own poetry, which has been most admired, is only poetry in the rhyme, and in the studied use of poetic diction.

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them before us, their number, and their order of battle, poured out upon the plain, "all plumed like ostriches, like eagles newly bathed, wanton as goats, wild as young bulls, youthful as May, and gorgeous as the sun at midsummer," covered with glittering armour, with dust and blood; while the gods quaff their nectar in golden cups, or mingle in the fray; and the old men assembled on the walls of Troy rise up with reverence as Helen passes by them. The multitude of things in Homer is wonderful; their splendour, their truth, their force, and variety. His poetry is, like his religion, the poetry of number and form: he describes the bodies as well as the souls of men.

The poetry of the Bible is that of imagination and of faith: it is abstract and disembodied: it is not the poetry of form, but of power; not of multitude, but of immensity. It does not divide into many, but aggrandizes into one. Its ideas of nature are like its ideas of God. It is not the poetry of social life, but of solitude: each man seems alone in the world, with the original forms of nature, the rocks, the earth, and the sky. It is not the poetry of action or heroic enterprise, but of faith in a supreme Providence, and resignation to the power that governs the universe. As the idea of God was removed farther from humanity and a scattered polytheism, it became more profound and intense, as it became more universal, for the Infinite is present to everything: "If we fly into the uttermost parts of the earth, it is there also; if we turn to the east or the west, we cannot escape from it." Man is thus aggrandized in the image of his Maker. The history of the patriarchs is of this kind; they are founders of the chosen race of people, the inheritors of the earth; they exist in the generations which are to come after them. Their poetry, like their religious creed, is vast, unformed, obscure, and infinite; a vision is upon it—an invisible hand is suspended over it. The spirit of the Christian religion consists in the glory hereafter to be revealed; but in the Hebrew dispensation, Providence took an immediate share in the affairs of this life. Jacob's dream arose out of this intimate communion between heaven and earth: it was this that let down, in the sight of the youthful patriarch, a golden ladder from the sky to the earth, with angels ascending and descending upon it, and shed

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a light upon the lonely place, which can never pass away. The story of Ruth, again, is as if all the depth of natural affection in the human race was involved in her breast. There are descriptions in the book of Job more prodigal of imagery, more intense in passion, than any thing in Homer, as that of the state of his prosperity, and of the vision that came upon him by night. The metaphors in the Old Testament are more boldly figurative. Things were collected more into masses, and gave a greater *momentum* to the imagination.

Dante was the father of modern poetry, and he may therefore claim a place in this connection. His poem is the first great step from Gothic darkness and barbarism; and the struggle of thought in it to burst the thraldom in which the human mind had been so long held, is felt in every page. He stood bewildered, not appalled, on that dark shore which separates the ancient and the modern world; and saw the glories of antiquity dawning through the abyss of time, while revelation opened its passage to the other world. He was lost in wonder at what had been done before him, and he dared to emulate it. Dante seems to have been indebted to the Bible for the gloomy tone of his mind, as well as for the prophetic fury which exalts and kindles his poetry; but he is utterly unlike Homer. His genius is not a sparkling flame, but the sullen heat of a furnace. He is power, passion, self-will personified. In all that relates to the descriptive or fanciful part of poetry he bears no comparison to many who had gone before, or who have come after, him; but there is a gloomy abstraction in his conceptions which lies like a dead weight upon the mind; a benumbing stupor, a breathless awe, from the intensity of the impression; a terrible obscurity, like that which oppresses us in dreams; an identity of interest, which moulds every object to its own purposes, and clothes all things with the passions and imaginations of the human soul,—that makes amends for all other deficiencies. The immediate objects he presents to the mind are not much in themselves; they want grandeur, beauty, and order; but they become everything by the force of the character he impresses upon them. His mind lends its own power to the objects which it contemplates, instead of borrowing it from them. He takes advantage even of the

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nakedness and dreary vacuity of his subject. His imagination peoples the shades of death, and broods over the silent air. He is the severest of all writers, the most hard and impenetrable, the most opposite to the flowery and glittering; who relies most on his own power, and the sense of it in others, and who leaves most room to the imagination of his readers. Dante's only endeavour is to interest; and he interests by exciting our sympathy with the emotion by which he is himself possessed. He does not place before us the objects by which that emotion has been created; but he seizes on the attention, by shewing us the effect they produce on his feelings; and his poetry accordingly gives the same thrilling and overwhelming sensation which is caught by gazing on the face of a person who has seen some object of horror. The improbability of the events, the abruptness and monotony in the Inferno, are excessive: but the interest never flags, from the continued earnestness of the author's mind. Dante's great power is in combining internal feelings with external objects. Thus the gate of hell, on which that withering inscription is written, seems to be endowed with speech and consciousness, and to utter its dread warning, not without a sense of mortal woes. This author habitually unites the absolutely local and individual with the greatest wildness and mysticism. In the midst of the obscure and shadowy regions of the lower world, a tomb suddenly rises up with the inscription, "I am the tomb of Pope Anastasius the Sixth:" and half the personages whom he has crowded into the Inferno are his own acquaintance. All this perhaps tends to heighten the effect by the bold intermixture of realities, and by an appeal, as it were, to the individual knowledge and experience of the reader. He affords few subjects for picture. There is, indeed, one gigantic one, that of Count Ugolino, of which Michael Angelo made a bas-relief, and which Sir Joshua Reynolds ought not to have painted.

Another writer whom I shall mention last, and whom I cannot persuade myself to think a mere modern in the groundwork, is Ossian. He is a feeling and a name that can never be destroyed in the minds of his readers. As Homer is the first vigour and lustihead, Ossian is the decay and old age of poetry. He lives only in the recollection and regret of the past. There

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is one impression which he conveys more entirely than all other poets, namely, the sense of privation, the loss of all things, of friends, of good name, of country—he is even without God in the world. He converses only with the spirits of the departed; with the motionless and silent clouds. The cold moonlight sheds its faint lustre on his head; the fox peeps out of the ruined tower; the thistle waves its beard to the wandering gale; and the strings of his harp seem, as the hand of age, as the tale of other times, passes over them, to sigh and rustle like the dry reeds in the winter's wind! The feeling of cheerless desolation, of the loss of the pith and sap of existence, of the annihilation of the substance, and the clinging to the shadow of all things as in a mock embrace, is here perfect. In this way, the lamentation of Selma for the loss of Salgar is the finest of all. If it were indeed possible to shew that this writer was nothing, it would only be another instance of mutability, another blank made, another void left in the heart, another confirmation of that feeling which makes him so often complain, "Roll on, ye dark brown years, ye bring no joy on your wing to Ossian!"

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LECTURE II.

ON CHAUCER AND SPENSER.

HAVING, in the former lecture, given some account of the nature of poetry in general, I shall proceed, in the next place, to a more particular consideration of the genius and history of English poetry. I shall take, as the subject of the present lecture, Chaucer and Spenser, two out of four of the greatest names in poetry which this country has to boast. Both of them, however, were much indebted to the earlier poets of Italy, and may be considered as belonging, in a certain degree, to the same school. The freedom and copiousness with which our most original writers, in former periods, availed themselves of the productions of their predecessors, frequently transcribing whole passages, without scruple or acknowledgment, may appear contrary to the etiquette of modern literature, when the whole stock of poetical commonplaces has become public property, and no one is compelled to trade upon any particular author. But it is not so much a subject of wonder, at a time when to read and write was of itself an honorary distinction, when learning was almost as great a rarity as genius, and when, in fact, those who first transplanted the beauties of other languages into their own, might be considered as public benefactors, and the founders of a national literature.—There are poets older than Chaucer, and in the interval between him and Spenser; but their genius was not such as to place them in any point of comparison with either of these celebrated men; and an inquiry into their particular merits or defects might seem rather to belong to the province of the antiquary than be thought generally interesting to the lovers of poetry in the present day.

Chaucer (who has been very properly considered as the father of English poetry) preceded Spenser by two centuries. He is

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supposed to have been born in London, in the year 1328, during the reign of Edward III., and to have died in 1400, at the age of seventy-two. He received a learned education at one, or at both, of the Universities, and travelled early into Italy, where he became thoroughly imbued with the spirit and excellences of the great Italian poets and prose-writers, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio; and is said to have had a personal interview with one of these, Petrarch. He was connected, by marriage, with the famous John of Gaunt, through whose interest he was introduced into several public employments. Chaucer was an active partisan, a religious reformer, and, from the share he took in some disturbances, on one occasion, he was obliged to fly the country. On his return, he was imprisoned, and made his peace with government, as it is said, by a discovery of his associates. Fortitude does not appear, at any time, to have been the distinguishing virtue of poets. There is, however, an obvious similarity between the practical turn of Chaucer's mind and restless impatience of his character, and the tone of his writings. Yet it would be too much to attribute the one to the other as cause and effect: for Spenser, whose poetical temperament was as effeminate as Chaucer's was stern and masculine, was equally engaged in public affairs, and had mixed equally in the great world. So much does native disposition predominate over accidental circumstances, moulding them to its previous bent and purposes! For, while Chaucer's intercourse with the busy world, and collision with the actual passions and conflicting interests of others, seemed to brace the sinews of his understanding, and gave to his writings the air of a man who describes persons and things that he had known and been intimately concerned in; the same opportunities, operating on a differently constituted frame, only served to alienate Spenser's mind the more from the "close pent-up" scenes of ordinary life, and to make him "rive their concealing continents," to give himself up to the unrestrained indulgence of "flowery tenderness."

It is not possible for any two writers to be more opposite in this respect. Spenser delighted in luxurious enjoyment; Chaucer, in severe activity of mind. As Spenser was the most romantic and visionary, Chaucer was the most practical of all the

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great poets, the most a man of business and the world. His poetry reads like history. Everything has a downright reality; at least in the relator's mind. A simile, or a sentiment, is as if it were given in upon evidence. Thus he describes Cressid's first avowal of her love:

> "And as the new abashed nightingale,
> That stinteth first when she beginneth sing,
> When that she heareth any herde's tale,
> Or in the hedges any wight stirring,
> And after, sicker, doth her voice outring;
> Right so Cresseide, when that her dread stent,
> Open'd her heart, and told him her intent."

This is so true and natural, and beautifully simple, that the two things seem identified with each other. Again, it is said in the Knight's Tale—

> "Thus passeth yere by yere, and day by day,
> Till it felle ones in a morwe of May,
> That Emelie that fayrer was to sene
> Than is the lilie upon his stalke grene;
> And fresher than the May with floures newe,
> For with the rose-colour strof hire hewe:
> I n'ot which was the finer of hem two."

This scrupulousness about the literal preference, as if some question of matter of fact was at issue, is remarkable. I might mention that other, where he compares the meeting between Palamon and Arcite to a hunter waiting for a lion in a gap;—

> "That stondeth at a gap with a spere,
> Whan hunted is the lion or the bere,
> And hereth him come rushing in the greves,
> And breking bothe the boughes and the leves:"—

or that still finer one of Constance, when she is condemned to death:

> "Have ye not seen sometime a pale face
> (Among a prees) of him that hath been lad
> Toward his deth, whereas he geteth no grace,
> And swiche a colour in his face hath had,
> Men might en know him that was so bestad

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Amonges all the faces in that route.
So stant Custance, and loketh hire aboute."

The beauty, the pathos here does not seem to be of the poet's seeking, but a part of the necessary texture of the fable. He speaks of what he wishes to describe with the accuracy, the discrimination of one who relates what has happened to himself, or has had the best information from those who have been eye-witnesses of it. The strokes of his pencil always tell. He dwells only on the essential, on that which would be interesting to the persons really concerned: yet, as he never omits any material circumstance, he is prolix from the number of points on which he touches, without being diffuse on any one; and is sometimes tedious from the fidelity with which he adheres to his subject, as other writers are from the frequency of their digressions from it. The chain of his story is composed of a number of fine links, closely connected together, and rivetted by a single blow. There is an instance of the minuteness which he introduces into his most serious descriptions in his account of Palamon when left alone in his cell:

"Swiche sorrow he maketh that the grete tour
Resouned of his yelling and clamour:
The pure fetters on his shinnes grete
Were of his bitter salte teres wete."

The mention of this last circumstance looks like a part of the instructions he had to follow, which he had no discretionary power to leave out or introduce at pleasure. He is contented to find grace and beauty in truth. He exhibits for the most part the naked object, with little drapery thrown over it. His metaphors, which are few, are not for ornament, but use, and as like as possible to the things themselves. He does not affect to shew his power over the reader's mind, but the power which his subject has over his own. The readers of Chaucer's poetry feel more nearly what the persons he describes must have felt than perhaps those of any other poet. His sentiments are not voluntary effusions of the poet's fancy, but founded on the natural impulses and habitual prejudices of the characters he has to represent. There is an inveteracy of purpose, a sincerity of

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feeling, which never relaxes or grows vapid, in whatever they do or say. There is no artificial, pompous display, but a strict parsimony of the poet's materials, like the rude simplicity of the age in which he lived. His poetry resembles the root just springing from the ground rather than the full-blown flower. His muse is no "babbling gossip of the air," fluent and redundant; but, like a stammerer, or a dumb person, that has just found the use of speech, crowds many things together with eager haste, with anxious pauses, and fond repetitions, to prevent mistake. His words point as an index to the objects, like the eye or finger. There were none of the common-places of poetic diction in our author's time, no reflected lights of fancy, no borrowed roseate tints; he was obliged to inspect things for himself, to look narrowly, and almost to handle the object, as in the obscurity of morning we partly see and partly grope our way; so that his descriptions have a sort of tangible character belonging to them, and produce the effect of sculpture on the mind. Chaucer had an equal eye for truth of nature and discrimination of character; and his interest in what he saw gave new distinctness and force to his power of observation. The picturesque and the dramatic are in him closely blended together, and hardly distinguishable; for he principally describes external appearances as indicating character, as symbols of internal sentiment. There is a meaning in what he sees; and it is this which catches his eye by sympathy. Thus the costume and dress of the Canterbury Pilgrims—of the Knight—the Squire—the Oxford Scholar—the Gap-toothed Wife of Bath, and the rest, speak for themselves. To take one or two of these at random:

"There was also a Nonne, a Prioresse,
That of hire smiling was ful simple and coy;
Hire gretest othe n'as but by seint Eloy:
And she was cleped Madame Eglentine.
Ful wel she sange the service divine
Entuned in hire nose ful swetely;
And Frenche she spake ful fayre and fetisly,
After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
For Frenche of Paris was to hire unknowe.

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At mete was she wel ytaughte withalte;
She lette no morsel from hire lippes falle,
Ne wette hire fingres in hire sauce depe.
* * * * * * *
And sikerly she was of great disport,
And ful pleasant, and amiable of port,
And peined hire to contrefeten chere
Of court, and ben estatelich of manere,
And to ben holden digne of reverence.
But for to speken of hire conscience,
She was so charitable and so pitous,
She wolde wepe if that she saw a mous
Caughte in a trappe, if it were ded or bledde,
Of smale houndes hadde she, that she fedde
With rosted flesh, and milk, and wastel brede,
But sore wept she if on of hem were dede,
Or if men smote it with a yerde smert:
And all was conscience and tendre herte.
Full semely hire wimple ypinched was;
Hire nose tretis; hire eyen grey as glas;
Hire mouth ful smale: and therto soft and red;
But sickerly she hadde a fayre forehed.
It was almost a spanne brode, I trowe."
* * * * * * * * *
"A Monk there was, a fayre for the maistrie,
An out-rider, that loved venerie:
A manly man, to ben an Abbot able.
Ful many a deinte hors hadde he in stable:
And whan he rode, men mighte his bridel here,
Gingeling in a whistling wind as clere,
And eke as loude, as doth the chapell belle,
Ther as this lord was keper of the celle.
The reule of Seint Maure and of Seint Benelt,
Because that it was olde and somdele streit,
This ilke monk lette olde thinges pace,
And held after the newe world the trace.
He yave not of the text a pulled hen,
That saith, that hunters ben not holy men;—
Therefore he was a prickasoure a right:
Greihoundes he hadde as swift as foul of flight:
Of pricking and of hunting for the hare
Was all his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.
I saw his sleves purfiled at the hond
With gris, and that the finest of the lond.
And for to fasten his hood under his chinne,
He had of gold ywrought a curious pinne:

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A love-knotte in the greter end ther was.
His hed was balled, and shone as any glas,
And eke his face, as it hadde ben anoint.
He was a lord ful fat and in good point.
His eyen stepe, and rolling in his hed,
That stemed as a forneis of a led.
His botes souple, his hors in gret estat,
Now certainly he was a fayre prelat.
He was not pale as a forpined gost.
A fat swan loved he best of any rost.
His palfrey was as browne as is a berry."

The Serjeant at law is the same identical individual as Lawyer Dowling in Tom Jones, who wished to divide himself into a hundred pieces, to be in a hundred places at once.

"No wher so besy a man as he ther n'as,
And yet he semed besier than he was."

The Frankelein, in "whose hous it snewed of mete and drinke;" the Shipman, "who rode upon a rouncie, as he couthe;" the Doctour of Phisike, "whose studie was but litel of the Bible;" the Wif of Bath, in

"All whose parish ther was non,
That to the offring before hire shulde gon,
And if ther did, certain so wroth was she,
That she was out of alle charitee;"

—the poure Persone of a toun, "whose parish was wide, and houses fer asonder;" the Miller, and the reve, "a slendre colerike man," are all of the same stamp. They are every one samples of a kind; abstract definitions of a species. Chaucer, it has been said, numbered the classes of men, as Linnæus numbered the plants. Most of them remain to this day: others, that are obsolete, and may well be dispensed with, still live in his descriptions of them. Such is the Sompnoure:

"A Sompnoure was ther with us in that place,
That hadde a fire-red cherubinnes face,
For sauseflem he was, with eyen narwe,
As hote he was, and likerous as a sparwe,
With scalled browes blake, and pilled berd
Of his visage children were sore aferd.

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Ther n'as quicksilver, litarge, ne brimston,
Boras, ceruse, ne oile of tartre non,
Ne oinement that wolde clense or bite,
That him might helpen of his whelkes white,
Ne of the knobbes sitting on his chekes.
Wel loved he garlike, onions, and lekes,
And for to drinke stronge win as rede as blood.
Than wolde he speke, and crie as he were wood.
And whan that he well dronken had the win,
Than wold he speken no word but Latin.
A fewe termes coude he, two or three,
That he had lerned out of som decree;
No wonder is, he heard it all the day.—
In danger hadde he at his owen gise
The yonge girles of the diocise,
And knew hir conseil, and was of hir rede.
A gerlond hadde he sette upon his hede
As gret as it were for an alestake:
A bokeler hadde he made him of a cake.
With him ther rode a gentil Pardonere—
That hadde a vois as smale as hath a gote."

It would be a curious speculation (at least for those who think that the characters of men never change, though manners, opinions, and institutions may,) to know what has become of this character of the Sompnoure in the present day; whether or not it has any technical representative in existing professions; into what channels and conduits it has withdrawn itself, where it lurks unseen in cunning obscurity, or else shews its face boldly, pampered into all the insolence of office, in some other shape, as it is deterred or encouraged by circumstances. *Chaucer's characters modernized*, upon this principle of historic derivation, would be an useful addition to our knowledge of human nature. But who is there to undertake it?

The descriptions of the equipage and accoutrements of the two kings of Thrace and Inde, in the Knight's Tale, are as striking and grand as the others are lively and natural:

"Ther maist thou se coming with Palamon
Licurge himself, the grete king of Trace:
Blake was his berd, and manly was his face,
The cercles of his eyen in his hed
They gloweden betwixen yelwe and red,

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And like a griffon loked he about,
With kemped heres on his browes stout;
His limmes gret, his braunes hard and stronge,
His shouldres brode, his armes round and longe.
And, as the guise was in his contree,
Ful highe upon a char of gold stood he,
With foure white bolles in the trais.
Instede of cote-armure on his harnais,
With nayles yelwe, and bright as any gold,
He hadde a beres skin, cole-blake for old.
His longe here was kempte behind his bak,
As any ravenes fether it shone for blake.
A wreth of gold arm-gret, of huge weight,
Upon his hed sate full of stones bright,
Of fine rubins and of diamants.
About his char ther wenten white alauns,
Twenty and mo, as gret as any stere,
To hunten at the leon or the dere,
And folwed him, with mosel fast ybound.—
With Arcite, in stories as men find
The grete Emetrius, the king of Inde,
Upon a stede bay, trapped in stele,
Covered with cloth of gold diapred wele,
Came riding like the god of armes, Mars.
His cote-armure was of a cloth of Tars,
Couched with perles, white, and round and grete.
His sadel was of brent gold new ybete;
A mantelet upon his shouldres hanging
Bret-ful of rubies red, as fire sparkling.
His crispe here like ringes was yronne,
And that was yelwe, and glitered as the Sonne.
His nose was high, his eyen bright citrin,
His lippes round, his colour was sanguin,
A fewe fraknes in his face yspreint,
Betwixen yelwe and blake somdel ymeint,
And as a leon he his loking caste.
Of five-and-twenty yere his age I caste.
His berd was wel begonnen for to spring;
His vois was as a trompe thundering.
Upon his hed he wered of laurer grene
A gerlond freshe and lusty for to sene.
Upon his hond he bare, for his deduit,
An egle tame, as any lily whit.—
About this king there ran on every part
Ful many a tame leon and leopart."

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What a deal of terrible beauty there is contained in this description! The imagination of a poet brings such objects before us as when we look at wild beasts in a menagerie; their claws are pared, their eyes glitter like harmless lightning; but we gaze at them with a pleasing awe, clothed in beauty, formidable in the sense of abstract power.

Chaucer's descriptions of natural scenery possess the same sort of characteristic excellence, or what might be termed *gusto*. They have a local truth and freshness, which gives the very feeling of the air, the coolness or moisture of the ground. Inanimate objects are thus made to have a fellow-feeling in the interest of the story, and render back the sentiment of the speaker's mind. One of the finest parts of Chaucer is of this mixed kind. It is the beginning of the Flower and the Leaf, where he describes the delight of that young beauty, shrowded in her bower, and listening in the morning of the year to the singing of the nightingale; while her joy rises with the rising song, and gushes out afresh at every pause, and is borne along with the full tide of pleasure, and still increases, and repeats, and prolongs itself, and knows no ebb. The coolness of the arbour, its retirement, the early time of the day, the sudden starting up of the birds in the neighbouring bushes, the eager delight with which they devour and rend the opening buds and flowers, are expressed with a truth and feeling which make the whole appear like the recollection of an actual scene:

"Which as me thought was right a pleasing sight,
And eke the briddes song for to here,
Would haue rejoyced any earthly wight,
And I that couth not yet in no manere
Heare the nightingale of all the yeare,
Ful busily herkened with herte and with ear
If I her voice perceiue coud any where.

And I that all this pleasaunt sight sie,
Thought sodainly I felt so sweet an aire
Of the eglentere, that certainely
There is no herte I deme in such dispaire,
Ne with thoughts froward and contraire,
So ouerlaid, but it should soone haue bote,
If it had ones felt this savour sote.

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And as I stood and cast aside mine eie,
I was ware of the fairest medler tree
That ever yet in all my life I sie
As full of blossomes as it might be,
Therein a goldfinch leaping pretile
Fro bough to bough, and as him list he eet
Here and there of buds and floures sweet.

And to the herber side was joyning
This faire tree, of which I haue you told,
And at the last the brid began to sing,
Whan he had eaten what he eat wold,
So passing sweetly, that by manifold
It was more pleasaunt than I coud deuise
And whan his song was ended in this wise,

The nightingale with so merry a note
Answered him that all the wood rong
So sodainly, that as it were a sote,
I stood astonied, so was I with the song
Thorow rauished, that til late and long,
I ne wist in what place I was, ne where,
And ayen me thought she song euen by mine ere.

Wherefore I waited about busily
On euery side, if I her might see,
And at the last I gan full well aspie
Where she sat in a fresh grene laurer tree,
On the further side euen right by me,
That gaue so passing a delicious smell,
According to eglentere full well,

Whereof I had so inly great pleasure,
That as me thought I surely rauished was
Into Paradice, where my desire
Was for to be, and no ferther passe
As for that day, and on the sote grasse
I sat me downe, for as for mine entent,
The birds' song was more conuenient,

And more pleasaunt to me, by manifold,
Than meat or drinke, or any other thing,
Thereto the herber was so fresh and cold,
The wholesome sauours eke so comforting,
That, as I demed, sith the beginning
Of the world was neuer seene or than
So pleasaunt a ground of none earthly man.

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And as I sat the birds harkening thus,
Me thought that I heard voices sodainly
The most sweetest and most delicious
That euer any wight I trow truly
Heard in their life, for the armony
And sweet accorde was in so good musike,
That the uoice to angels was most like."

There is here no affected rapture, no flowery sentiment: the whole is an ebullition of natural delight "welling out of the heart," like water from a crystal spring. Natural is the soul of art: there is a strength as well as a simplicity in the imagination, that reposes entirely on nature, that nothing else can supply. It was the same trust in nature, and reliance on his subject, which enabled Chaucer to describe the grief and patience of Griselda; the faith of Constance; and the heroic perseverance of the little child, who, going to school through the streets of Jewry,

"Oh *Alma Redemptoris mater*, loudly sung,"

and who after his death still triumphed in his song. Chaucer has more of this deep, internal, sustained sentiment, than any other writer, except Boccaccio. In depth of simple pathos, and intensity of conception, never swerving from his subject, I think no other writer comes near him, not even the Greek tragedians. I wish to be allowed to give one or two instances of what I mean. I will take the following from the Knight's Tale. The distress of Arcite, in consequence of his banishment from his love, is thus described:

"Whan that Arcite to Thebes comen was,
Ful oft a day he swelt and said Alas,
For sene his lady shall he never mo.
And shortly to concluden all his wo,
So mochel sorwe hadde never creature,
That is or shall be, while the world may dure,
His slepe, his mete, his drinke is him byraft.
That lene he wex, and drie as is a shaft
His eyen holwe, and grisly to behold,
His hewe salwe, and pale as ashen cold,
And solitary he was, and ever alone,
And waiking all the night, making his mone.

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And if he herde song or instrument,
Than wold he wepe, he mighte not be stent.
So feble were his spirites, and so low,
And changed so that no man coude know
His speche, ne his vois, though men it herd."

The picture of the sinking of the heart, of the wasting away of the body and mind, of the gradual failure of all the faculties under the contagion of a rankling sorrow, cannot be surpassed. Of the same kind is his farewell to his mistress, after he has gained her hand and lost his life in the combat:

"Alas the wo! alas the peines stronge,
That I for you have suffered, and so longe!
Alas the deth! alas min Emilie!
Alas departing of our compagnie;
Alas min hertes quene! alas my wif!
Min hertis ladie, ender of my lif!
What is this world? what axen men to have?
Now with his love, now in his colde grave
Alone withouten any compagnie."

The death of Arcite is the more affecting as it comes after triumph and victory, after the pomp of sacrifice, the solemnities of prayer, the celebration of the gorgeous rites of chivalry. The descriptions of the three temples of Mars, of Venus, and Diana, of the ornaments and ceremonies used in each, with the reception given to the offerings of the lovers, have a beauty and grandeur, much of which is lost in Dryden's version. For instance, such lines as the following are not rendered with their true feeling:

"Why shulde I not as well eke tell you all
The purtreiture that was upon the wall
Within the temple of mighty Mars the rede—
That hight the gret temple of Mars in Trace
In thilke colde and frosty region,
Ther as Mars hath his sovereine mansion.
First on the wall was peinted a forest,
In which ther wonneth neyther man ne best,
With knotty knarry barrein trees old
Of stubbes sharpe and hidous to behold;
In which ther ran a romble and a swough
As though a storm shuld bresten every bough."

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And again, among innumerable terrific images of death and slaughter painted on the wall, is this one:

"The statue of Mars upon a carte stood
Armed, and looked grim as he were wood.
A wolf ther stood beforne him at his fete
With eyen red, and of a man he ete."

The story of Griselda is in Boccaccio; but the Clerk of Oxenforde, who tells it, professes to have learned it from Petrarch. This story has gone all over Europe, and has passed into a proverb. In spite of the barbarity of the circumstances, which are abominable, the sentiment remains unimpaired and unalterable. It is of that kind "that heaves no sigh, that sheds no tear;" but it hangs upon the beatings of the heart; it is a part of the very being; it is as inseparable from it as the breath we draw. It is still and calm as the face of death. Nothing can touch it in its etherial purity: tender as the yielding flower, it is fixed as the marble firmament. The only remonstrance she makes, the only complaint she utters against all the ill-treatment she receives, is that single line where, when turned back naked to her father's house, she says,

"Let me not like a worm go by the way."

The first outline given of the character is inimitable;

"Nought fer fro thilke paleis honourable,
Wher as this markis shope his marriage,
Ther stood a thorpe, of sight delitable,
In which that poure folk of that village
Hadden her bestes and her herbergage,
And of hir labour toke hir sustenance,
After that the erthe yave hem habundance.

Among this pour folk ther dwelt a man,
Which that was holden pourest of hem all:
But highe God sometime senden can
His grace unto a litel oxes stall:
Janicola men of that thorpe him call.
A doughter had he, faire ynough to sight,
And Grisildis this yonge maiden hight.

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But for to speke of virtuous beautee,
Than was she on the fairest under Sonne:
Ful pourely yfostred up was she:
No likerous lust was in hire herte yronne;
Ful ofter of the well than of the tonne
She dranke, and for she wolde vertue plese,
She knew wel labour, but non idel ese.

But though this mayden tendre were of age,
Yet in the brest of hire virginitee
Ther was enclosed sad and ripe corage:
And in gret reverence and charitee
Hire olde poure fader fostred she:
A few sheep spinning on the feld she kept,
She wolde not ben idel til she slept.

And whan she homward came she wolde bring
Wortes and other herbes times oft,
The which she shred and sethe for hire living,
And made hire bed ful hard, and nothing soft:
And ay she kept hire fadres lif on loft
With every obeisance and diligence,
That child may don to fadres reverence.

Upon Grisilde, this poure creature,
Ful often sithe this markis sette his eye,
As he on hunting rode peraventure:
And whan it fell that he might hire espie,
He not with wonton loking of folie
His eyen cast on hire, but in sad wise
Upon hire chere he wold him oft avise.

Commending in his herte hire womanhede,
And eke hire vertue, passing any wight
Of so yong age, as wel in chere as dede.
For though the people have no gret insight
In vertue, he considered ful right
Hire bountee, and disposed that he wold
Wedde hire only, if ever he wedden shold.

Grisilde of this (God wot,) ful innocent,
That for hire shapen was all this array,
To fetchen water at a welle is went,
And cometh home as sone as ever she may.
For wel she had heard say that thilke day
The markis shulde wedde, and, if she might,
She wolde fayne han seen som of that sight.

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She thought, "I wol with other maidens stond,
That ben my felawes, in our dore, and see
The markisesse, and thereto wol I fond
To don at home, as sone as it may be,
The labour which longeth unto me,
And than I may at leiser hire behold,
If she this way unto the castel hold."

And she wolde over the threswold gon
The markis came and gan hire for to call,
And she set doun her water-pot anon
Beside the threswold in an oxes stall,
And doun upon hire knees she gan to fall.
And with sad countenance kneleth still,
Till she had heard what was the lordes will."

The story of the little child slain in Jewry, (which is told by the Prioress, and worthy to be told by her who was "all conscience and tender heart,") is not less touching than that of Griselda. It is simple and heroic to the last degree. The poetry of Chaucer has a religious sanctity about it, connected with the manners and superstitions of the age. It has all the spirit of martyrdom.

It has also all the extravagance and the utmost licentiousness of comic humour, equally arising out of the manners of the time. In this too Chaucer resembled Boccaccio, that he excelled in both styles, and could pass at will, "from grave to gay, from lively to severe;" but he never confounded the two styles together (except from that involuntary and unconscious mixture of the pathetic and humorous which is almost always to be found in nature,) and was exclusively taken up with what he set about, whether it was jest or earnest. The Wife of Bath's Prologue (which Pope has very admirably modernised) is, perhaps, unequalled as a comic story. The Cock and the Fox is also excellent for lively strokes of character and satire. January and May is not so good as some of the others. Chaucer's versification, considering the time at which he wrote, and that versification is a thing in a great degree mechanical, is not one of his least merits. It has considerable strength and harmony, and its apparent deficiency in the latter respect arises chiefly from the alterations which have since taken place in the pronunciation of

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mode of accenting the words of the language. The best general rule for reading him is to pronounce the final *e*, as in reading Italian.

It was observed in the last Lecture, that painting describes what the object is in itself, poetry what it implies or suggests. Chaucer's poetry is not, in general, the best confirmation of the truth of this distinction, for his poetry is more picturesque and historical than almost any other. But there is one instance in point which I cannot help giving in this place. It is the story of the three thieves who go in search of Death to kill him, and who, meeting with him, are entangled in their fate by his words, without knowing him. In the printed catalogue to Mr. West's (in some respects very admirable) picture of Death on the Pale Horse, it is observed that, "In poetry the same effect is produced by a few abrupt and rapid gleams of description, touching, as it were with fire, the features and edges of a general mass of awful obscurity; but in painting, such indistinctness would be a defect, and imply that the artist wanted the power to pourtray the conceptions of his fancy. Mr. West was of opinion that to delineate a physical form, which in its moral impression would approximate to that of the visionary Death of Milton, it was necessary to endow it, if possible, with the appearance of super-human strength and energy. He has therefore exerted the utmost force and perspicuity of his pencil on the central figure."—One might suppose from this, that the way to represent a shadow was to make it as substantial as possible. Oh, no! Painting has its prerogatives (and high ones they are,) but they lie in representing the visible, not the invisible. The moral attributes of Death are powers and effects of an infinitely wide and general description, which no individual or physical form can possibly represent but by a courtesy of speech, or by a distant analogy. The moral impression of Death is essentially visionary; its reality is in the mind's eye. Words are here the only *things*; and things, physical forms, the mere mockeries of the understanding. The less definite, the less bodily the conception, the more vast, unformed, and unsubstantial, the nearer does it approach to some resemblance of that omnipresent, lasting, universal, irresistible principle, which everywhere, and at some time or other, exerts its

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power over all things. Death is a mighty abstraction, like Night, or Space, or Time. He is an ugly customer, who will not be invited to supper, or to sit for his picture. He is with us and about us, but we do not see him. He stalks on before us, and we do not mind him: he follows us close behind, and we do not turn to look back at him. We do not see him making faces at us in our life-time, nor perceive him afterwards sitting in mock-majesty, a twin-skeleton, beside us, tickling our bare ribs, and staring into our hollow eye-balls! Chaucer knew this. He makes three riotous companions go in search of Death to kill him, they meet with an old man whom they reproach with his age, and ask why he does not die, to which he answers thus:

> "Ne Deth, alas! ne will not han my lif.
> Thus walke I like a restless caitiff,
> And on the ground, which is my modres gate,
> I knocke with my staf, erlich and late,
> And say to hire, 'Leve mother, let me in.
> Lo, how I vanish, flesh and blood and skin,
> Alas! when shall my bones ben at reste?
> Mother, with you wolde I changen my cheste,
> That in my chambre longe time hath be,
> Ye, for an heren cloute to wrap in me.'
> But yet to me she will not don that grace
> For which ful pale and welked is my face."

They then ask the old man where they shall find out Death to kill him, and he sends them on an errand which ends in the death of all three. We hear no more of him, but it is Death that they have encountered.

The interval between Chaucer and Spenser is long and dreary. There is nothing to fill up the chasm but the names of Occleve, "ancient Gower," Lydgate, Wyatt, Surry, and Sackville. Spenser flourished in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and was sent with Sir John Davies into Ireland, of which he has left behind him some tender recollections in his description of the bog of Allan, and a record in an ably written paper, containing observations on the state of that country and the means of improving it, which remain in full force to the present day. Spenser died at an obscure inn in London, it is supposed in distressed circumstances. The treatment he received from Burleigh is well

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known. Spencer, as well as Chaucer, was engaged in active life; but the genius of his poetry was not active: it is inspired by the love of ease, and relaxation from all the cares and business of life. Of all the poets, he is the most poetical. Though much later than Chaucer, his obligations to preceding writers were less. He has in some measure borrowed the plan of his poem (as a number of distinct narratives) from Ariosto; but he has engrafted upon it an exuberance of fancy, and an endless voluptuousness of sentiment, which are not to be found in the Italian writer. Farther, Spencer is even more of an inventor in the subject-matter. There is an originality, richness, and variety in his allegorical personages and fictions, which almost vies with the splendour of the ancient mythology. If Ariosto transports us into the regions of romance, Spenser's poetry is all fairy-land. In Ariosto, we walk upon the ground, in company, gay, fantastic, and adventurous enough. In Spenser, we wander in another world, among ideal beings. The poet takes and lays us in the lap of a lovelier nature, by the sound of softer streams, among greener hills and fairer valleys. He paints nature, not as we find it, but as we expected to find it; and fulfils the delightful promise of our youth. He waves his wand of enchantment—and at once embodies airy beings, and throws a delicious veil over all actual objects. The two worlds of reality and of fiction are poised on the wings of his imagination. His ideas, indeed, seem more distinct than his perceptions. He is the painter of abstractions, and describes them with dazzling minuteness. In the mask of Cupid he makes the god of love "clap on high his coloured winges *twain*:" and it is said of Gluttony, in the Procession of the Passions,

"In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad."

At times he becomes picturesque from his intense love of beauty, as where he compares Prince Arthur's crest to the appearance of the almond tree:

"Upon the top of all his lofty crest,
A bunch of hairs discolour'd diversely
With sprinkled pearl and gold full richly drest,

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Did shake and seem'd to daunce for jollity;
Like to an almond tree ymounted high
On top of green Selenis all alone,
With blossoms brave bedecked daintily;
Her tender locks do tremble every one
At every little breath that under heav'n is blown."

The love of beauty, however, and not of truth, is the moving principle of his mind; and he is guided in his fantastic delineations by no rule but the impulse of an inexhaustible imagination. He luxuriates equally in scenes of Eastern magnificence, or the still solitude of a hermit's cell—in the extremes of sensuality, or refinement.

In reading the Faery Queen, you see a little withered old man by a wood-side opening a wicket, a giant, and a dwarf lagging far behind, a damsel in a boat upon an enchanted lake, wood-nymphs, and satyrs; and all of a sudden you are transported into a lofty palace, with tapers burning, amidst knights and ladies, with dance and revelry, and song, "and mask, and antique pageantry." What can be more solitary, more shut up in itself, than his description of the house of Sleep, to which Archimago sends for a dream:

"And, more to lull him in his slumber soft,
A trickling stream from high rock tumbling down,
And ever-drizzling rain upon the loft,
Mix'd with a murmuring wind, much like the sound
Of swarming bees, did cast him in a swound,
No other noise, nor people's troublous cries,
That still are wont t' annoy the walled town,
Might there be heard; but careless quiet lies
Wrapt in eternal silence, far from enemies."

It is as if "the honey-heavy dew of slumber" had settled on his pen in writing these lines. How different in the subject (and yet how like in beauty) is the following description of the Bower of Bliss:

"Eftsoones they heard a most melodious sound
Of all that mote delight a dainty ear;
Such as at once might not on living ground,
Save in this Paradise, be heard elsewhere:

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Right hard it was for wight which did it hear
To tell what manner musicke that mote be
For all that pleasing is to living eare
Was there consorted in one harmonie;
Birds, voices, instruments, windes, waters, all agree.

The joyous birdes shrouded in chearefull shade
Their notes unto the voice attempred sweet:
The angelical soft trembling voices made
To th' instruments divine respondence meet.
The silver sounding instruments did meet
With the base murmur of the water's fall;
The water's fall with difference discreet,
Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
The gentle warbling wind low answered to all."

The remainder of the passage has all that voluptuous pathos, and languid brilliancy of fancy, in which this writer excelled:

"The whiles some one did chaunt this lovely lay;
Ah! see, whoso fayre thing dost fain to see,
In springing flower the image of thy day!
Ah! see the virgin rose, how sweetly she
Doth first peep forth with bashful modesty,
That fairer seems the less ye see her may!
Lo! see soon after how more bold and free
Her bared bosom she doth broad display;
Lo! see soon after, how she fades and falls away!

So passeth in the passing of a day
Of mortal life the leaf, the bud, the flower;
Ne more doth flourish after first decay,
That erst was sought, to deck both bed and bower
Of many a lady and many a paramour!
Gather therefore the rose whilst yet is prime,
For soon comes age that will her pride deflower;
Gather the rose of love whilst yet is time,
Whilst loving thou mayest loved be with equal crime.*

He ceased; and then gan all the quire of birds
Their divers notes to attune unto his lay,
As in approvance of his pleasing wordes.
The constant pair heard all that he did say,
Yet swerved not, but kept their forward way

* Taken from Tasso.

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Through many covert groves and thickets close,
In which they creeping did at last display*
That wanton lady with her lover loose,
Whose sleepy head she in her lap did soft dispose.

Upon a bed of roses she was laid,
As faint through heat, or dight to pleasant sin;
And was arrayed or rather disarrayed,
All in a veil of silk and silver thin,
That hid no whit her alabaster skin,
But rather shewed more white, if more might be:
More subtle web Arachne cannot spin;
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched dew, do not in the air more lightly flee.

Her snowy breast was bare to greedy spoil,
Of hungry eyes which n' ote therewith be fill'd,
And yet through languor of her late sweet toil
Few drops more clear than nectar forth distill'd,
That like pure Orient perles adown it trill'd;
And her fair eyes sweet smiling in delight
Moisten'd their fiery beams, with which she thrill'd
Frail hearts, yet quenched not; like starry light,
Which, sparkling on the silent waves, does seem more bright."

The finest things in Spenser are, the character of Una, in the first book; the House of Pride; the Cave of Mammon, and the Cave of Despair; the account of Memory, of whom it is said, among other things,

"The wars he well remember'd of King Nine,
Of old Assaracus and Inachus divine;"

the description of Belphœbe; the story of Florimel and the Witch's son; the Gardens of Adonis, and the Bower of Bliss; the Mask of Cupid; and Colin Clout's vision, in the last book. But some people will say that all this may be very fine, but that they cannot understand it on account of the allegory. They are afraid of the allegory as if they thought it would bite them: they look at it as a child looks at a painted dragon, and think it will strangle them in its shining folds. This is very idle.

* This word is an instance of those unwarrantable freedoms which Spenser sometimes took with language.

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If they do not meddle with the allegory, the allegory will not meddle with them. Without minding it at all, the whole is as plain as a pike-staff. It might as well be pretended that we cannot see Poussin's pictures for the allegory, as that the allegory prevents us from understanding Spenser. For instance, when Britomart, seated amidst the young warriors, lets fall her hair and discovers her sex, is it necessary to know the part she plays in the allegory, to understand the beauty of the following stanza?

"And eke that stranger knight amongst the rest
Was for like need enforc'd to disarray,
Tho' when as vailed was her lofty crest,
Her golden locks that were in trammels gay
Upbounden, did themselves adown display,
And raught unto her heels like sunny beams
That in a cloud their light did long time stay;
Their vapour faded, shew their golden gleams,
And through the persant air shoot forth their azure streams."

Or is there any mystery in what is said of Belphœbe, that her hair was sprinkled with flowers and blossoms which had been entangled in it as she fled through the woods? Or is it necessary to have a more distinct idea of Proteus than that which is given of him in his boat, with the frighted Florimel at his feet, while

"——— the cold icicles from his rough beard
Dropped adown upon her snowy breast!"

Or is it not a sufficient account of one of the sea-gods, that pass by them, to say—

"That was Arion crowned:—
So went he playing on the watery plain."

Or to take the Procession of the Passions that draw the coach of Pride, in which the figures of Idleness, of Gluttony, of Lechery, of Avarice, of Envy, and of Wrath speak, one should think, plain enough for themselves; such as this of Gluttony:

"And by his side rode loathsome Gluttony,
Deformed creature, on a filthy swine;

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His belly was up blown with luxury;
And eke with fatness swollen were his eyne;
And like a crane his neck was long and fine,
With which he swallowed up excessive feast,
For want whereof poor people oft did pine.

In green vine leaves he was right fitly clad:
For other clothes he could not wear for heat;
And on his head an ivy garland had,
From under which fast trickled down the sweat:
Still, as he rode, he somewhat still did eat.
And in his hand did bear a boozing can,
Of which he supt so oft that on his seat
His drunken corse he scarce upholden can;
In shape and size more like a monster than a man."

Or this of Lechery:

"And next to him rode lustfull Lechery
Upon a bearded goat, whose rugged hair
And whaly eyes (the sign of jealousy)
Was like the person's self whom he did bear:
Who rough and black and filthy did appear.
Unseemly man to please fair lady's eye:
Yet he of ladies oft was loved dear,
When fairer faces were bid standen by:
O! who does know the bent of woman's fantasy?

In a green gown he clothed was full fair,
Which underneath did hide his filthiness;
And in his hand a burning heart he bare,
Full of vain follies and new fangleness;
For he was false and fraught with fickleness;
And learned had to love with secret looks;
And well could dance; and sing with ruefulness;
And fortunes tell; and read in loving books;
And thousand other ways to bait his fleshly hooks.

Inconstant man that loved all he saw,
And lusted after all that he did love;
Ne would his looser life be tied to law;
But joyed weak women's hearts to tempt and prove,
If from their loyal loves he might them move."

This is pretty plain-spoken. Mr. Southey says, of Spenser,

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——"Yet not more sweet
Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise;
High priest of all the Muses' mysteries!"

On the contrary, no one was more apt to pry into mysteries which do not strictly belong to the Muses.

Of the same kind with the Procession of the Passions, as little obscure, and still more beautiful, is the Mask of Cupid, with his train of votaries:

"The first was Fancy, like a lovely boy
Of rare aspect, and beauty without peer;

His garment neither was of silk nor say,
But painted plumes in goodly order dight,
Like as the sun-burnt Indians do array
Their tawny bodies in their proudest plight:
As those same plumes so seem'd he vain and light,
That by his gait might easily appear;
For still he far'd as dancing in delight,
And in his hand a windy fan did bear
That in the idle air he mov'd still here and there.

And him beside march'd amorous Desire,
Who seem'd of riper years than the other swain,
Yet was that other swain this elder's sire,
And gave him being, common to them twain:
His garment was disguised very vain,
And his embroidered bonnet sat awry;
'Twixt both his hands few sparks he close did strain,
Which still he blew, and kindled busily,
That soon they life conceiv'd and forth in flames did fly.

Next after him went Doubt, who was yclad
In a discolour'd coat of strange disguise,
That at his back a broad capuccio had,
And sleeves dependant *Albanese-wise*;
He lookt askew with his mistrustful eyes,
And nicely trod, as thorns lay in his way,
Or that the floor to shrink he did avise;
And on a broken reed he still did stay
His feeble steps, which shrunk when hard thereon he lay.

With him went Daunger, cloth'd in ragged weed,
Made of bear's skin, that him more dreadful made;

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Yet his own face was dreadfull, ne did need
Strange horror to deform his grisly shade;
A net in th' one hand, and a rusty blade
In th' other was; this Mischiefe, that Mishap;
With th' one his foes he threat'ned to invade,
With th' other he his friends meant to enwrap;
For whom he could not kill he practiz'd to entrap.

Next him was Fear, all arm'd from top to toe,
Yet thought himselfe not safe enough thereby,
But fear'd each shadow moving to and fro;
And his own arms when glittering he did spy
Or clashing heard, he fast away did fly,
As ashes pale of hue, and winged-heel'd;
And evermore on Daunger fixt his eye,
'Gainst whom he always bent a brazen shield,
Which his right hand unarmed fearfully did wield.

With him went Hope, in rank a handsome maid,
Of chearfull look and lovely to behold;
In silken samite she was light array'd,
And her fair locks were woven up in gold;
She always smil'd, and in her hand did hold
An holy-water sprinkled dipt in dew,
With which she sprinkled favours manifold
On whom she list, and did great liking shew,
Great liking unto many, but true love to few.

Next after them, the winged God himself
Came riding on a lion ravenous,
Taught to obey the menage of that elfe
That man and beast with power imperious
Subdueth to his kingdom tyrannous:
His blindfold eyes he bade awhile unbind;
That his proud spoil of that same dolorous
Fair dame he might behold in perfect kind;
Which seen, he much rejoiced in his cruel mind.

Of which full proud, himself uprearing high,
He looked round about with stern disdain,
And did survey his goodly company:
And, marshalling the evil-ordered train,
With that the darts which his right hand did strain,
Full dreadfully he shook, that all did quake,
And clapt on high his colour'd winges twain,
That all his many it afraid did make:
Tho' blinding him again, he his way forth did take."

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The description of Hope, in this series of historical portraits, is one of the most beautiful in Spenser: and the triumph of Cupid, at the mischief he has made, is worthy of the malicious urchin deity. In reading these descriptions, one can hardly avoid being reminded of Rubens's allegorical pictures; but the account of Satyrane's taming the lion's whelps and lugging the bear's cubs along in his arms while yet an infant, whom his mother so naturally advises to "go seek some other play-fellows," has even more of this high picturesque character. Nobody but Rubens could have painted the fancy of Spenser; and he could not have given the sentiment, the airy dream that hovers over it!

With all this, Spenser neither makes us laugh nor weep. The only jest in his poem is an allegorical play upon words, where he describes Malbecco as escaping in the herd of goats, "by the help of his fayre horns on hight." But he has been unjustly charged with a want of passion and of strength. He has both in an immense degree. He has not indeed the pathos of immediate action or suffering, which is more properly the dramatic; but he has all the pathos of sentiment and romance—all that belongs to distant objects of terror, and uncertain, imaginary distress. His strength, in like manner, is not strength of will or action, of bone and muscle, nor is it coarse and palpable—but it assumes a character of vastness and sublimity seen through the same visionary medium, and blended with the appalling associations of preternatural agency. We need only turn, in proof of this, to the Cave of Despair, or the Cave of Mammon, or to the account of the change of Malbecco into Jealousy. The following stanzas, in the description of the Cave of Mammon, the grisly house of Plutus, are unrivalled for the portentous massiness of the forms, the splendid chiaro-scuro, and shadowy horror.

"That house's form within was rude and strong,
Like an huge cave hewn out of rocky clift,
From whose rough vault the ragged breaches hung,
Embossed with massy gold of glorious gift,
And with rich metal loaded every rift,
That heavy ruin they did seem to threat:
And over them Arachne high did lift

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Her cunning web, and spread her subtle net,
Enwrapped in foul smoke, and clouds more black than jet.

Both roof and floor, and walls were all of gold,
But overgrown with dust and old decay,*
And hid in darkness that none could behold
The hue thereof: for view of cheerful day
Did never in that house itself display,
But a faint shadow of uncertain light;
Such as a lamp whose light doth fade away;
Or as the moon clothed with cloudy night
Does show to him that walks in fear and sad affright.

* * * * * * * * *

And over all sad Horror with grim hue
Did always soar, beating his iron wings;
And after him owls and night-ravens flew,
The hateful messengers of heavy things,
Of death and dolour telling sad tidings;
Whiles sad Celleno, sitting on a clift,
A song of bitter bale and sorrow sings,
That heart of flint asunder could have rift;
Which having ended, after him she flieth swift."

The Cave of Despair is described with equal gloominess and power of fancy; and the fine moral declamation of the owner of it, on the evils of life, almost makes one in love with death. In the story of Malbecco, who is hunted by Jealousy, and in vain strives to run away from his own thoughts—

"High over hill and over dale he flies"—

the truth of human passion and the preternatural ending are equally striking.—It is not fair to compare Spenser with Shakspeare, in point of interest. A fairer comparison would be with Comus; and the result would not be unfavourable to Spenser. There is only one work of the same allegorical kind, which has more interest than Spenser (with scarcely less imagination:) and that is the Pilgrim's Progress. The three first books of the Faery Queen are very superior to the three last. One

* "That all with one consent praise new-born gauds,
Tho' they are made and moulded of things past,
And give to Dust that is a little gilt,
More laud than gold o'er-dusted."

Troilus and Cressida.

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would think that Pope, who used to ask if any one had ever read the Faery Queen through, had only dipped into these last. The only things in them equal to the former are the account of Talus, the Iron Man, and the delightful episode of Pastorella.

The language of Spenser is full, and copious, to overflowing: it is less pure and idiomatic than Chaucer's, and is enriched and adorned with phrases borrowed from the different languages of Europe, both ancient and modern. He was, probably, seduced into a certain license of expression by the difficulty of filling up the moulds of his complicated rhymed stanza form the limited resources of his native language. This stanza, with alternate and repeatedly recurring rhymes, is borrowed from the Italians. It was peculiarly fitted to their language, which abounds in similar vowel terminations, and is as little adapted to ours, from the stubborn, unaccommodating resistance which the consonant endings of the northern languages make to this sort of endless sing-song.—Not that I would on that account part with the stanza of Spencer. We are, perhaps, indebted to this very necessity of finding out new forms of expression, and to the occasional faults to which it led, for a poetical language, rich and varied and magnificent beyond all former, and almost all later, example. His versification is, at once, the most smooth and the most sounding in the language. It is a labyrinth of sweet sounds, "in many a winding bout of linked sweetness long drawn out,"—that would cloy by their very sweetness, but that the ear is constantly relieved and enchanted by their continued variety of modulation—dwelling on the pauses of the action, or flowing on in a fuller tide of harmony with the movement of the sentiment. It has not the bold dramatic transitions of Shakspeare's blank verse, nor the high-raised tone of Milton's; but it is the perfection of melting harmony, dissolving the soul in pleasure, or holding it captive in the chains of suspense. Spenser was the poet of our waking dreams; and he has invented not only a language, but a music of his own for them. The undulations are infinite, like those of the waves of the sea: but the effect is still the same, lulling the senses into a deep oblivion of the jarring noises of the world, from which we have no wish to be ever recalled.

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LECTURE III

ON SHAKSPEARE AND MILTON.

In looking back to the great works of genius in former times, we are sometimes disposed to wonder at the little progress which has since been made in poetry, and in the arts of imitation in general. But this is perhaps a foolish wonder. Nothing can be more contrary to the fact, than the supposition that in what we understand by the *fine arts*, as painting, and poetry, relative perfection is only the result of repeated efforts in successive periods, and that what has been once well done, constantly leads to something better. What is mechanical, reducible to rule, or capable of demonstration, is progressive, and admits of gradual improvement: what is not mechanical, or definite, but depends on feeling, taste, and genius, very soon becomes stationary, or retrograde, and loses more than it gains by transfusion. The contrary opinion is a vulgar error, which has grown up, like many others, from transferring an analogy of one kind to something quite distinct, without taking into the account the difference in the nature of the things, or attending to the difference of the results. For most persons, finding what wonderful advances have been made in biblical criticism, in chemistry, in mechanics, in geometry, astronomy, &c., *i. e.* in things depending on mere enquiry and experiment, or on absolute demonstration, have been led hastily to conclude that there was a general tendency in the efforts of the human intellect to improve by repetition, and, in all other arts and institutions, to grow perfect and mature by time. We look back upon the theological creed of our ancestors, and their discoveries in natural philosophy, with a smile of pity: science, and the arts connected with it, have all had their infancy, their youth, and manhood, and seem to contain in them no principle

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of limitation or decay: and, enquiring no farther about the matter, we infer, in the intoxication of our pride, and the height of our self-congratulation, that the same progress has been made, and will continue to be made, in all other things which are the work of man. The fact, however, stares us so plainly in the face that one would think the smallest reflection must suggest the truth, and overturn our sanguine theories. The greatest poets, the ablest orators, the best painters, and the finest sculptors that the world ever saw, appeared soon after the birth of these arts, and lived in a state of society which was, in other respects, comparatively barbarous. Those arts, which depend on individual genius and incommunicable power, have always leaped at once from infancy to manhood, from the first rude dawn of invention to their meridian height and dazzling lustre, and have in general declined ever after. This is the peculiar distinction and privilege of each, of science and of art:—of the one, never to attain its utmost limit of perfection; and of the other, to arrive at it almost at once. Homer, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, Dante, and Ariosto, (Milton alone was of a later age, and not the worse for it)—Raphael, Titian, Michael Angelo, Correggio, Cervantes, and Boccaccio, the Greek sculptors and tragedians,—all lived near the beginning of their arts—perfected, and all but created, them. These giant-sons of genius stand indeed upon the earth, but they tower above their fellows; and the long line of their successors, in different ages, does not interpose any object to obstruct their view, or lessen their brightness. In strength and stature they are unrivalled; in grace and beauty they have not been surpassed. In after ages and more refined periods (as they are called,) great men have arisen one by one, as it were by throes and at intervals; though in general, the best of these cultivated and artificial minds were of an inferior order; as Tasso and Pope, among poets; Guido and Vandyke, among painters. But in the earlier stages of the arts, as soon as the first mechanical difficulties had been got over, and the language was sufficiently acquired, they rose by clusters, and in constellations, never so to rise again!

The arts of painting and poetry are conversant with the world of thought within us, and with the world of sense around us—

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with what we know, and see, and feel intimately. They flow from the sacred shrine of our own breasts, and are kindled at the living lamp of nature. But the pulse of the passions assuredly beat as high, the depths and soundings of the human heart were as well understood, three thousand or three hundred years ago as they are at present: the face of nature and "the human face divine" shone as bright then as they have ever done. But it is *their* light, reflected by true genius on art, that marks out its path before it, and sheds a glory round the Muses' feet like that which

> "Circled Una's angel face,
> And made a sunshine in the shady place."

The four greatest names in English poetry, are almost the four first we come to—Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton. There are no others that can really be put in competitio with these. The two last have had justice done them by the voice of common fame. Their names are blazoned in the very firmament of reputation; while the two first, (though "the fault has been more in their stars than in themselves, that they are underlings") either never emerged far above the horizon, or were too soon involved in the obscurity of time. The three first of these are excluded from Dr. Johnson's Lives of the Poets (Shakspeare indeed is so from the dramatic form of his compositions:) and the fourth, Milton, is admitted with a reluctant and churlish welcome.

In comparing these four writers together, it might be said that Chaucer excels as the poet of manners, or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakspeare, as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term;) and Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are; Spenser, as we wish them to be; Shakspeare, as they would be; and Milton, as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all: but the principle or moving power, to which this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer, was habit, or inveterate prejudice; in Spenser, novelty, and the love of the marvellous; in Shakspeare, it was the force of pas-

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sion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances; and in Milton, only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity; of Spenser, remoteness; of Milton, elevation; of Shakspeare, everything. It has been said, by some critic, that Shakspeare was distinguished from the other dramatic writers of his day only by his wit; that they had all his other qualities but that; that one writer had as much sense, another as much fancy, another as much knowledge of character, another the same depth of passion, and another as great a power of language. This statement is not true; nor is the inference from it well-founded, even if it were. This person does not seem to have been aware that, upon his own showing, the great distinction of Shakspeare's genius was its virtually including the genius of all the great men of his age, and not his differing from them in one accidental particular. But to have done with such minute and literal trifling.

The striking peculiarity of Shakspeare's mind was its generic quality, its power of communication with all other minds—so that it contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one peculiar bias, or exclusive excellence more than another. He was just like any other man, but that he was like all other men. He was the least of an egotist that it was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become. He not only had in himself the germs of every faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune or conflict of passion, or turn of thought. He "had a mind reflecting ages past," and present:—all the people that ever lived are there. There was no respect of persons with him. His genius shone equally on the evil and on the good, on the wise and on the foolish, the monarch and the beggar: "All corners of the earth, kings, queens, and states, maids, matrons, nay, the secrets of the grave," are hardly hid from his searching glance. He was like the genius of humanity, changing places with all of us at pleasure, and playing with our purposes as with his own. He turned the globe round for his amusement, and surveyed the generations of men, and the individuals as they passed, with

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their different concerns, passions, follies, vices, virtues, actions, and motives—as well those that they knew, as those which they did not know or acknowledge to themselves. The dreams of childhood, the ravings of despair, were the toys of his fancy. Airy beings waited at his call, and came at his bidding. Harmless fairies "nodded to him, and did him curtesies:" and the night-hag bestrode the blast at the command of "his so potent art." The world of spirits lay open to him, like the world of real men and women: and there is the same truth in his delineations of the one as of the other; for if the preternatural characters he describes could be supposed to exist, they would speak, and feel and act, as he makes them. He had only to think of anything in order to become that thing, with all the circumstances belonging to it. When he conceived of a character, whether real or imaginary, he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly, and as if by touching a secret spring, to be surrounded with all the same objects, "subject to the same skyey influences," the same local, outward, and unforeseen accidents which would occur in reality. Thus the character of Caliban not only stands before us with a language and manners of its own, but the scenery and situation of the enchanted island he inhabits, the traditions of the place, its strange noises, its hidden recesses, "his frequent haunts and ancient neighborhood," are given with a miraculous truth of nature, and with all the familiarity of an old recollection. The whole "coheres semblably together" in time, place, and circumstance. In reading this author, you do not merely learn what his characters say,—you see their persons. By something expressed or understood, you are at no loss to decipher their peculiar physiognomy, the meaning of a look, the grouping, the by-play, as we might see it on the stage. A word, an epithet paints a whole scene, or throws us back whole years in the history of the person represented. So (as it has been ingeniously remarked) when Prospero describes himself as left alone in the boat with his daughter, the epithet which he applies to her, "Me and thy *crying* self," flings the imagination instantly back from the grown woman to the helpless condition of infancy, and places the first and most trying scene of his misfortunes before us, with all that he must have suffered

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in the interval. How well the silent anguish of Macduff is conveyed to the reader, by the friendly expostulation of Malcolm—"What! man, ne'er pull your hat upon your brows!" Again, Hamlet, in the scene with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, somewhat abruptly concludes his fine soliloquy on life by saying, "Man delights not me, nor woman neither,—though by your smiles you seem to say so." Which is explained by their answer—"My lord, we had no such stuff in our thoughts. But we smiled to think, if you delight not in man, what lenten entertainment the players shall receive from you whom we met on the way:"—as if while Hamlet was making this speech, his two old schoolfellows from Wittenburg had been really standing by, and he had seen them smiling by stealth, at the idea of the players crossing their minds. It is not "a combination and a form" of words, a set speech or two, a preconcerted theory of a character, that will do this: but all the persons concerned must have been present in the poet's imagination, as at a kind of rehearsal; and whatever would have passed through their minds on the occasion, and have been observed by others, passed through his, and is made known to the reader.—I may add in passing, that Shakspeare always gives the best directions for the costume and carriage of his heroes. Thus, to take one example, Ophelia gives the following account of Hamlet; and as Ophelia had seen Hamlet, I should think her word ought to be taken against that of any modern authority.

"*Ophelia.* My lord, as I was reading in my closet,
Prince Hamlet, with his doublet all unbrac'd,
No hat upon his head, his stockings loose,
Ungartered, and down-gyved to his ancle,
Pale as his shirt, his knees knocking each other,
And with a look so piteous,
As if he had been sent from hell
To speak of horrors, thus he comes before me.
Polonius. Mad for thy love!
Oph. My lord, I do not know,
But truly I do fear it.
Pol. What said he?
Oph. He took me by the wrist, and held me hard.
Then goes he to the length of all his arm;
And with his other hand thus o'er his brow,

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He falls to such perusal of my face,
As he would draw it: long staid he so;
At last a little shaking of my arm,
And thrice his head thus waving up and down,
He rais'd a sigh so piteous and profound,
As it did seem to shatter all his bulk,
And end his being. That done, he lets me go,
And, with his head over his shoulder turn'd,
He seem'd to find his way without his eyes;
For out of doors he went without their help,
And to the last bended their light on me."

Act II., *Scene* 1.

How, after this airy, fantastic idea of irregular grace and bewildered melancholy, any one can play Hamlet, as we have seen it played, with strut, and stare and antic right-angled sharp-pointed gestures, it is difficult to say, unless it be that Hamlet is not bound, by the prompter's cue, to study the part of Ophelia. The account of Ophelia's death begins thus:

"There is a willow hanging o'er a brook,
That shows its hoary leaves in the glassy stream."—

Now this is an instance of the same unconscious power of mind which is as true to nature as itself. The leaves of the willow are, in fact, white underneath, and it is this part of them which would appear "hoary" in the reflection in the brook. The same sort of intuitive power, the same faculty of bringing every object in nature, whether present or absent, before the mind's eye, is observable in the speech of Cleopatra, when conjecturing what were the employments of Antony in his absence:—"He's speaking now, or murmuring, Where's my serpent of old Nile?" How fine to make Cleopatra have this consciousness of her own character, and to make her feel that it is this for which Antony is in love with her! She says, after the battle of Actium, when Antony has resolved to risk another fight, "It is my birth-day; I had thought to have held it poor: but since my lord is Antony again, I will be Cleopatra." What other poet would have thought of such a casual resource of the imagination, or would have dared to avail himself of it? The thing happens in the play as it might have happened in fact. That which, perhaps,

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more than anything else distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakspeare from all others, is this wonderful truth and individuality of conception. Each of his characters is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as well as of the author, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet may be said, for the time, to identify himself with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to another, like the same soul successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself, and makes every word appear to proceed from the mouth of the person in whose name it is given. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and overheard what passed. As in our dreams we hold conversations with ourselves, make remarks, or communicate intelligence, and have no idea of the answer which we shall receive, and which we ourselves make, till we hear it —so the dialogues in Shakspeare are carried on without any consciousness of what is to follow, without any appearance of preparation or premeditation. The gusts of passion come and go like sounds of music borne on the wind. Nothing is made out by formal inference and analogy, by climax and antithesis: all comes, or seems to come, immediately from nature. Each object and circumstance exists in his mind, as it would have existed in reality: each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without confusion or effort. In the world of his imagination, everything has a life, a place, and being of its own!

Chaucer's characters are sufficiently distinct from one another, but they are too little varied in themselves, too much like identical propositions. They are consistent, but uniform; we get no new idea of them from first to last; they are not placed in different lights, nor are their subordinate *traits* brought out in new situations; they are like portraits or physiognomical studies, with the distinguishing features marked with inconceivable truth and precision, but that preserve the same unaltered air and attitude. Shakspeare's are historical figures, equally true and correct, but put into action, where every nerve and muscle is displayed in

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the struggle with others, with all the effect of collision and contrast, with every variety of light and shade. Chaucer's characters are narrative, Shakspeare's dramatic, Milton's epic. That is, Chaucer told only as much of his story as he pleased, as was required for a particular purpose. He answered for his characters himself. In Shakspeare they are introduced upon the stage, are liable to be asked all sorts of questions, and are forced to answer for themselves. In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakspeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact wit it. Till the experiment is tried, we do not know the result, the turn which the character will take in its new circumstances. Milton took only a few simple principles of character, and raised them to the utmost conceivable grandeur, and refined them from every base alloy. His imagination, "nigh sphered in Heaven," claimed kindred only with what he saw from that height, and could raise to the same elevation with itself. He sat retired and kept his state alone, "playing with wisdom;" while Shakspeare mingled with the crowd, and played the host, "to make society the sweeter welcome."

The passion in Shakspeare is of the same nature as his delineation of character. It is not some one habitual feeling, or sentiment, preying upon itself, growing out of itself, and moulding everything to itself; it is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable with him; subject to all the fluctuations of caprice and accident; calling into play all the resources of the understanding and all the energies of the will; irritated by obstacles, or yielding to them; rising from small beginnings to its utmost height; now drunk with hope, now stung to madness, now sunk in despair, now blown to air with a breath, now raging like a torrent. The human soul is made the sport of fortune, the prey of adversity: it is stretched on the wheel of destiny, in restless ecstasy. The passions are in a state of projection. Years are melted down to moments, and every instant teems with fate. We know the results, we see the process

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Thus, after Iago has been boasting to himself of the effect of his poisonous suggestions on the mind of Othello, "which, with a little act upon the blood, will work like mines of sulphur," he adds—

> "Look where he comes! not poppy, nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the East,
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou ow'dst yesterday."—

And he enters at this moment, like the crested serpent, crowned with his wrongs and raging for revenge! The whole depends upon the turn of a thought. A word, a look, blows the spark of jealousy into a flame; and the explosion is immediate and terrible as a volcano. The dialogues in Lear, in Macbeth, that between Brutus and Cassius, and nearly all those in Shakspeare, where the interest is wrought up to its highest pitch, afford examples of this dramatic fluctuation of passion. The interest in Chaucer is quite different; it is like the course of a river, strong, and full, and increasing. In Shakspeare, on the contrary, it is like the sea, agitated this way and that, and loud-lashed by furious storms; while, in the still pauses of the blast, we distinguish only the cries of despair, or the silence of death! Milton, on the other hand, takes the imaginative part of passion—that which remains after the event, which the mind reposes on when all is over, which looks upon circumstances from the remotest elevation of thought and fancy, and abstracts them from the world of action to that of contemplation. The objects of dramatic poetry affect us by sympathy, by their nearness to ourselves, as they take us by surprise, or force us upon action, "while rage with rage doth sympathise:" the objects of epic poetry affect us through the medium of the imagination, by magnitude and distance, by their permanence and universality. The one fill us with terror and pity, the other with admiration and delight. There are certain objects that strike the imagination, and inspire awe in the very idea of them, independently of any dramatic interest, that is, of any connection with the vicissitudes of human life. For instance, we cannot think of the pyramids of Egypt, of a Gothic ruin, or an old

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Roman encampment, without a certain emotion, a sense of power and sublimity coming over the mind. The heavenly bodies that hang over our heads wherever we go, and "in their untroubled element shall shine when we are laid in dust, and all our cares forgotten," affect us in the same way. Thus Satan's address to the Sun has an epic, not a dramatic interest; for though the second person in the dialogue makes no answer and feels no concern, yet the eye of that vast luminary is upon him, like the eye of Heaven, and seems conscious of what he says, like an universal presence. Dramatic poetry and epic, in their perfection, indeed, approximate to and strengthen one another. Dramatic poetry borrows aid from the dignity of persons and things, as the heroic does from human passion, but in theory they are distinct. When Richard II. calls for the looking-glass to contemplate his faded majesty in it, and bursts into that affecting exclamation: "Oh, that I were a mockery-king of snow, to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke," we have here the utmost force of human passion, combined with the ideas of regal splendour and fallen power. When Milton says of Satan:

> "——— His form had not yet lost
> All her original brightness, nor appear'd
> Less than archangel ruin'd, and th' excess
> Of glory obscur'd;"—

the mixture of beauty, of grandeur, and pathos, from the sense of irreparable loss, of never-ending, unavailing regret, is perfect.

The great fault of a modern school of poetry is that it is an experiment to reduce poetry to a mere effusion of natural sensibility; or, what is worse, to divest it both of imaginary splendour and human passion, to surround the meanest objects with the morbid feelings and devouring egotism of the writers' own minds. Milton and Shakspeare did not so understand poetry. They gave a more liberal interpretation both to nature and art. They did not do all they could to get rid of the one and the other, to fill up the dreary void with the Moods of their own Minds. They owe their power over the human mind to their having had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the

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objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. But to the men I speak of there is nothing interesting, nothing heroical, but themselves. To them the fall of gods or of great men is the same. They do not enter into the feeling. They cannot understand the terms. They are even debarred from the last poor, paltry consolation of an unmanly triumph over fallen greatness; for their minds reject, with a convulsive effort and intolerable loathing, the very idea that there ever was, or was thought to be, anything superior to themselves. All that has ever excited the attention or admiration of the world they look upon with the most perfect indifference; and they are surprised to find that the world repays their indifference with scorn. "With what measure they mete, it has been meted to them again."—

Shakspeare's imagination is of the same plastic kind as his conception of character or passion. "It glances from heaven in earth, from earth to heaven." Its movement is rapid and devious. It unites the most opposite extremes; or, as Puck says, in boasting of his own feats, "puts a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes." He seems always hurrying from his subject, even while describing it; but the stroke, like the lightning's, is sure as it is sudden. He takes the widest possible range, but from that very range he has his choice of the greatest variety and aptitude of materials. He brings together images the most alike, but placed at the greatest distance from each other; that is, found in circumstances of the greatest dissimilitude. From the remoteness of his combinations, and the celerity with which they are effected, they coalesce the more indissolubly together. The more the thoughts are strangers to each other, and the longer they have been kept asunder, the more intimate does their union seem to become. Their felicity is equal to their force. Their likeness is made more dazzling by their novelty. They startle, and take the fancy prisoner in the same instant. I will mention one or two which are very striking, and not much known, out of Troilus and Cressida. Æneas says to Agamemnon,

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"I ask that I may waken reverence,
And on the cheek be ready with a blush,
Modest as morning, when she coldly eyes
The youthful Phœbus."

Ulysses, urging Achilles to show himself in the field, says—

"No man is the lord of any thing,
Till he communicate his parts to others:
Nor doth he of himself know them for aught,
Till he behold them formed in the applause,
Where they're extended! which like an arch reverberates
The voice again, or like a gate of steel,
Fronting the sun, receives and renders back
Its figure and its heat."

Patroclus gives the indolent warrior the same advice.

"Rouse yourself; and the weak wanton Cupid
Shall from your neck unloose his amorous fold,
And like a dew-drop from the lion's mane
Be shook to air."

Shakspeare's language and versification are like the rest of him. He has a magic power over words: they come winged at his bidding; and seem to know their places. They are struck out at a heat, on the spur of the occasion, and have all the truth and vividness which arise from an actual impression of the objects. His epithets and single phrases are like sparkles, thrown off from an imagination fired by the whirling rapidity of its own motion. His language is hieroglyphical. It translates thoughts into visible images. It abounds in sudden transitions and elliptical expressions. This is the source of his mixed metaphors, which are only abbreviated forms of speech. These, however, give no pain from long custom. They have, in fact, become idioms in the language. They are the building, and not the scaffolding to thought. We take the meaning and effect of a well-known passage entire, and no more stop to scan and spell out the particular words and phrases, than the syllables of which they are composed. In trying to recollect any other author, one sometimes stumbles, in case of failure, on a word as good. In Shakspeare, any other word but the true one, is sure to be

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wrong. If any body, for instance, could not recollect the words of the following description,

"——— Light thickens,
And the crow makes wing to the rooky wood,"

he would be greatly at a loss to substitute others for them equally expressive of the feeling. These remarks, however, are strictly applicable only to the impassioned parts of Shakspeare's language, which flowed from the warmth and originality of his imagination, and were his own. The language used for prose conversation and ordinary business is sometimes technical, and involved in the affectation of the time. Compare, for example, Othello's apology to the senate, relating "his whole course of love," with some of the preceding parts relating to his appointment, and the official dispatches from Cyprus. In this respect, "the business of the state does him offence." His versification is no less powerful, sweet, and varied. It has every occasional excellence, of sullen intricacy, crabbed and perplexed, or of the smoothest and loftiest expansion—from the ease and familiarity of measured conversation to the lyrical sounds

"——— Of ditties highly penned,
Sung by a fair queen in a summer's bower,
With ravishing division to her lute."

It is the only blank verse in the language, except Milton's, that for itself is readable. It is not stately and uniformly swelling like his, but varied and broken by the inequalities of the ground it has to pass over in its uncertain course,

"And so by many winding nooks it strays,
With willing sport to the wild ocean."

It remains to speak of the faults of Shakspeare. They are not so many or so great as they have been represented; what there are are chiefly owing to the following causes:—The universality of his genius was, perhaps, a disadvantage to his single works; the variety of his resources, sometimes diverting from applying them to the most effectual purposes. He be said to combine the powers of Æschylus and Aristopl

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of Dante and Rabelais, in his own mind. If he had been only half what he was, he would perhaps have appeared greater. The natural ease and indifference of his temper made him sometimes less scrupulous than he might have been. He is relaxed and careless in critical places; he is in earnest throughout only in Timon, Macbeth, and Lear. Again, he had no models of acknowledged excellence constantly in view to stimulate his efforts, and, by all that appears, no love of fame. He wrote for the "great, vulgar and the small," in his time, not for posterity. If Queen Elizabeth and the maids of honour laughed heartily at his worst jokes, and the catcalls in the gallery were silent at his best passages, he went home satisfied, and slept the next night well. He did not trouble himself about Voltaire's criticisms. He was willing to take advantage of the ignorance of the age in many things; and if his plays pleased others, not to quarrel with them himself. His very facility of production would make him set less value on his own excellences, and not care to distinguish nicely between what he did well or ill. His blunders in chronology and geography do not amount to above half a dozen, and they are offences against chronology and geography, not against poetry. As to the unities, he was right in setting them at defiance. He was fonder of puns than became so great a man. His barbarisms were those of his age. His genius was his own. He had no objection to float down with the stream of common taste and opinion: he rose above it by his own buoyancy, and an impulse which he could not keep under, in spite of himself or others, and "his delights did show most dolphin-like."

He had an equal genius for comedy and tragedy; and his tragedies are better than his comedies, because tragedy is better than comedy. His female characters, which have been found fault with as insipid, are the finest in the world. Lastly, Shakspeare was the least of a coxcomb of any one that ever lived, and much of a gentleman.

Shakspeare discovers in his writings little religious enthusiasm, and an indifference to personal reputation; he had none of the bigotry of his age, and his political prejudices were not very strong. In these respects, as well as in every other, he

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formed a direct contrast to Milton. Milton's works are a perpetual invocation to the Muses; a hymn to Fame. He had his thoughts constantly fixed on the contemplation of the Hebrew theocracy, and of a perfect commonwealth; and he seized the pen with a hand just warm from the touch of the ark of faith. His religious zeal infused its character into his imagination; so that he devotes himself with the same sense of duty to the cultivation of his genius, as he did to the exercise of virtue, or the good of his country. The spirit of the poet, the patriot, and the prophet, vied with each other in his breast. His mind appears to have held equal communion with the inspired writers, and with the bards and sages of ancient Greece and Rome;—

> "Blind Thamyris, and blind Mœonides,
> And Tiresias, and Phineus, prophets old."

He had a high standard, with which he was always comparing himself, nothing short of which could satisfy his jealous ambition.

> "——— Sad task, yet argument
> Not less, but more heroic, than the wrath
> Of stern Achilles on his foe pursued,
> If answerable still, I can obtain.
> ——— Unless an age too late, or cold
> Climate, or years, damp my extended wing."

He thought of nobler forms and nobler things than those he found about him. He lived apart, in the solitude of his own thoughts, carefully excluding from his mind whatever might distract its purposes or alloy its purity, or damp its zeal. "With darkness and with dangers compassed round," he had the mighty models of antiquity always present to his thoughts, and determined to raise a monument of equal height and glory, "piling up every stone of lustre from the brook," for the delight and wonder of posterity. He had girded himself up, and, as it were, sanctified his genius to this service from his youth. "For after," he says, "I had from my first years, by the ceaseless diligence and care of my father, been exercised to the tongues, and some sciences, as my age could suffer, by sundry masters and teachers, it was found that whether aught was imposed upon me by them, or betaken to of my own choice, the style, by certain

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vital signs it had, was likely to live; but much latelier, in the private academies of Italy, perceiving that some trifles which I had in memory, composed at under twenty or thereabout, met with acceptance above what was looked for; I began thus far to assent both to them and divers of my friends here at home, and not less to an inward prompting which now grew daily upon me, that by labour and intense study (which I take to be my portion in this life,) joined with the strong propensity of nature, I might perhaps leave something so written to after-times as they should not willingly let it die. The accomplishment of these intentions, which have lived within me ever since I could conceive myself anything worth to my country, lies not but in a power above man's to promise; but that none hath by more studious ways endeavoured, and with more unwearied spirit that none shall, that I dare almost aver of myself, as far as life and free leisure will extend. Neither do I think it shame to covenant with any knowing reader, that for some few years yet, I may go on trust with him toward the payment of what I am now indebted, as being a work not to be raised from the heat of youth or the vapours of wine; like that which flows at waste from the pen of some vulgar amourist, or the trencher fury of a rhyming parasite, nor to be obtained by the invocation of Dame Memory and her Siren daughters, but by devout prayer to that eternal Spirit who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, and sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar, to touch and purify the lips of whom he pleases: to this must be added industrious and select reading, steady observation, and insight into all seemly and generous arts and affairs. Although it nothing content me to have disclosed thus much beforehand; but that I trust hereby to make it manifest with what small willingness I endured to interrupt the pursuit of no less hopes than these, and leave a calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts, to embark in a troubled sea of noises and hoarse disputes, from beholding the bright countenance of truth in the quiet and still air of delightful studies."

So that of Spenser:

> "The noble heart that harbours virtuous thought,
> And is with child of glorious great intent,

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Can never rest until it forth have brought
The eternal brood of glory excellent."

Milton, therefore, did not write from casual impulse, but after a severe examination of his own strength, and with a resolution to leave nothing undone which it was in his power to do. He always labours, and almost always succeeds. He strives hard to say the finest things in the world, and he does say them. He adorns and dignifies his subject to the utmost: he surrounds it with every possible association of beauty or grandeur, whether moral, intellectual, or physical. He refines on his descriptions of beauty; loading sweets on sweets, till the sense aches at them; and raises his images of terror to a gigantic elevation, that "makes Ossa like a wart." In Milton, there is always an appearance of effort: in Shakspeare, scarcely any.

Milton has borrowed more than any other writer, and exhausted every source of imitation, sacred or profane; yet he is perfectly distinct from every other writer. He is a writer of centos, and yet in originality scarcely inferior to Homer. The power of his mind is stamped on every line. The fervour of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials. In reading his works, we feel ourselves under the influence of a mighty intellect, that the nearer it approaches to others, becomes more distinct from them. The quantity of art in him shows the strength of his genius: the weight of his intellectual obligations would have oppressed any other writer. Milton's learning has all the effect of intuition. He describes objects, of which he could only have read in books, with the vividness of actual observation. His imagination has the force of nature. He makes words tell as pictures.

"Him followed Rimmon, whose delightful seat
Was fair Damascus, on the fertile banks
Of Abbana and Pharphar, lucid streams."

The word *lucid* here gives to the idea all the sparkling effect of the most perfect landscape.

And again:

"As when a vulture on Imaus bred,
Whose snowy ridge the roving Tartar bounds,

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Dislodging from a region scarce of prey,
To gorge the flesh of lambs and yeanling kids
On hills where flocks are fed, *flies towards the springs*
Of Ganges or Hydaspes, Indian streams;
But in his way lights on the barren plains
Of Scricana, where Chineses drive
With sails and wind their cany wagons light."

If Milton had taken a journey for the express purpose, he could not have described this scenery and mode of life better. Such passages are like demonstrations of natural history. Instances might be multiplied without end.

There is also a decided tone in his descriptions, an eloquent dogmatism, as if the poet spoke from thorough conviction, which Milton probably derived from his spirit of partisanship, or else his spirit of partisanship from the natural firmness and vehemence of his mind. In this Milton resembles Dante (the only one of the moderns with whom he has anything in common,) and it is remarkable that Dante, as well as Milton, was a political partisan. That approximation to the severity of impassioned prose, which has been made an objection to Milton's poetry, is one of its chief excellencies.

We might be tempted to suppose that the vividness with which he describes visible objects was owing to their having acquired an unusual degree of strength in his mind, after the privation of his sight; but we find the same palpableness and truth in the descriptions which occur in his early poems. In Lycidas he speaks of "the great vision of the guarded mount," with that preternatural weight of impression with which it would present itself suddenly to "the pilot of some small night-foundered skiff:" and the lines in the Penseroso, describing "the wandering moon,"

"Riding near her highest noon,
Like one that had been led astray
Through the heaven's wide pathless way,"

are as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her. There is also the same depth of impression in his descriptions of the objects of all the different senses, whether colours, or sounds, or smells—the same absorption of his mind in whatever engaged

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his attention at the time. Milton had as much of what is meant by *gusto* as any poet.* He forms the most intense conception of things, and then embodies them by a single stroke of his pen. He has an inveterate attachment to the objects he describes and to the words describing them:

"Wild above rule or art, *enormous* bliss."

It has been indeed objected to Milton, by a common perversity of criticism, that his ideas were musical rather than picturesque, as if, because they were in the highest degree musical, they must be (to keep the sage critical balance even, and to allow no one man to possess two qualities at the same time) proportionably deficient in other respects.—But Milton's poetry is not cast in any such narrow, common-place mould; it is not so barren of resources. His worship of the Muse was not so simple or confined. A sound arises "like a steam of rich distilled perfumes;" we hear the pealing organ, but the incense on the altars is also there, and the statues of the gods are ranged around! The ear indeed predominates over the eye, because it is more immediately affected, and because the language of music blends more immediately with, and forms a more natural accompaniment to, the variable and indefinite associations of ideas conveyed by words. But where the associations of the imagination are not the principal thing, the individual object is given by Milton with equal force and beauty. The strongest and best proof of this, as a characteristic power of his mind, is, that the persons of Adam and Eve, of Satan, &c., are always accompanied, in our imagination, with the grandeur of the naked figure; they convey to us the idea of sculpture. As an instance, take the following:

"——— He soon
Saw within ken a glorious Angel stand,
The same whom John saw also in the sun:
His back was turned, but not his brightness hid;
Of beaming sunny rays a golden tiar
Circled his head, nor less his locks behind

* The infinite quantity of dramatic invention in Shakspeare takes from his *gusto*. The power he delights to show is not intense, but discursive. He never insists on anything as much as he might, except a quibble.

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Illustrious on his shoulders fledge with wings
Lay waving round; on some great charge employ'd
He seem'd, or fix'd in cogitation deep.
Glad was the spirit impure, as now in hope
To find who might direct his wand'ring flight
To Paradise, the happy seat of man
His journey's end, and our beginning woe.
But first he casts to change his proper shape,
Which else might work him danger or delay:
And now a stripling cherub he appears,
Not of the prime, yet such as in his face
Youth smiled celestial, and to every limb
Suitable grace diffus'd, so well he feign'd:
Under a coronet his flowing hair
In curls on either cheek play'd; wings he wore
Of many a colour'd plume sprinkled with gold,
His habit fit for speed succinct, and held
Before his decent steps a silver wand."

The figures introduced here have all the elegance and precision of a Greek statue; glossy and impurpled, tinged with golden light, and musical as the strings of Memnon's harp!

Again, nothing can be more magnificent than the portrait of Beelzebub:

"With Atlantean shoulders fit to bear
The weight of mightiest monarchies:"

Or the comparison of Satan, as he "lay floating many a rood," to "that sea beast,"

"Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim the ocean-stream!"

What a force of imagination is there in this last expression! What an idea it conveys of the size of that hugest of created beings, as if it shrunk up the ocean to a stream, and took up the sea in its nostrils as a very little thing! Force of style is one of Milton's greatest excellences. Hence, perhaps, he stimulates us more in the reading, and less afterwards. The way to defend Milton against all impugners is to take down the book and read it.

Milton's blank verse is the only blank verse in the language (except Shakspeare's) that deserves the name of verse. Dr.

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Johnson, who had modelled his ideas of versification on the regular sing-song of Pope, condemns the Paradise Lost as harsh and unequal. I shall not pretend to say that this is not sometimes the case; for where a degree of excellence beyond the mechanical rules of art is attempted, the poet must sometimes fail. But I imagine that there are more perfect examples in Milton of musical expression, or of an adaptation of the sound and movement of the verse to the meaning of the passage, than in all our other writers, whether of rhyme or blank verse, put together (with the exception already mentioned.) Spenser is the most harmonious of our stanza writers, as Dryden is the most sounding and varied of our rhymists. But in neither is there any thing like the same ear for music, the same power of approximating the varieties of poetical, to those of musical, rhythm, as there is in our great epic poet. The sound of his lines is moulded into the expression of the sentiment, almost of the very image. They rise or fall, pause or hurry rapidly on, with exquisite art, but without the least trick or affectation, as the occasion seems to require.

The following are some of the finest instances:

"———— His hand was known
In heaven by many a tower'd structure high;—
Nor was his name unheard or unador'd
In ancient Greece: and in the Ausonian land
Men called him Mulciber: and how he fell
From Heaven, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
Sheer o'er the crystal battlements; from morn
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
A summer's day; and with the setting sun
Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
On Lemnos, the Ægean isle: thus they relate,
Erring."—

"———— But chief the spacious hall
Thick swarm'd, both on the ground and in the air,
Brush'd with the hiss of rustling wings. As bees
In spring time, when the sun with Taurus rides,
Pour forth their populous youth about the hive
In clusters; they among fresh dews and flow'rs
Fly to and fro: or on the smoothed plank,
The suburb of their straw-built citadel,
New rubb'd with balm, expatiate and confer

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Their state affairs. So thick the airy crowd
Swarm'd and were straiten'd; till the signal giv'n,
Behold a wonder! They but now who seem'd
In bigness to surpass earth's giant sons,
Now less than smallest dwarfs, in narrow room
Throng numberless, like that Pygmean race
Beyond the Indian mount, or fairy elves,
Whose midnight revels by a forest side
Or fountain, some belated peasant sees,
Or dreams he sees, while over-head the moon
Sits arbitress, and nearer to the earth
Wheels her pale course: they on their mirth and dance
Intent, with jocund music charm his ear;
At once with joy and fear his heart rebounds."

I can only give another instance, though I have some difficulty in leaving off.

"Round he surveys (and well might, where he stood
So high above the circling canopy
Of night's extended shade) from th' eastern point
Of Libra to the fleecy star that bears
Andromeda far off Atlantic seas
Beyond the horizon: then from pole to pole
He views in breadth, and without longer pause
Down right into the world's first region throws
His flight precipitant, and winds with ease
Through the pure marble air his oblique way
Amongst innumerable stars that shone
Stars distant, but nigh hand seem'd other worlds;
Or other worlds they seem'd or happy isles," &c.

The verse, in this exquisitely modulated passage, floats up and down as if it had itself wings. Milton has himself given us the theory of his versification—

"Such as the meeting soul may pierce
In notes with many a winding bout
Of linked sweetness long drawn out."

Dr. Johnson and Pope would have converted his vaulting Pegasus into a rocking-horse. Read any other blank verse but Milton's,—Thomson's, Young's, Cowper's, Wordsworth's,—and it will be found, from the want of the same insight into "the hidden soul of harmony," to be mere lumbering prose.

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To proceed to a consideration of the merits of Paradise Lost, in the most essential point of view, I mean as to the poetry of character and passion. I shall say nothing of the fable, or of other technical objections or excellences; but I shall try to explain at once the foundation of the interest belonging to the poem. I am ready to give up the dialogues in Heaven, where, as Pope justly observes, "God the Father turns a school-divine;" nor do I consider the battle of the angels as the climax of sublimity, or the most successful effort of Milton's pen. In a word, the interest of the poem arises from the daring ambition and fierce passions of Satan, and from the account of the paradisaical happiness, and the loss of it by our first parents. Three-fourths of the work are taken up with these characters, and nearly all that relates to them is unmixed sublimity and beauty. The two first books alone are like two massy pillars of solid gold.

Satan is the most heroic subject that ever was chosen for a poem; and the execution is as perfect as the design is lofty. He was the first of created beings, who, for endeavouring to be equal with the highest, and to divide the empire of heaven with the Almighty, was hurled down to hell. His aim was no less than the throne of the universe; his means, myriads of angelic armies bright, the third part of the heavens, whom he lured after him with his countenance, and who durst defy the Omnipotent in arms His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength of mind was matchless as his strength of body; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom, and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded. He stood like a tower; or

> "——— As when Heaven's fire
> Hath scathed the forest oaks or mountain pines."

He is still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own him as their sovereign leader, and whose fate he sym-

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pathises as he views them round, far as the eye can reach; though he keeps aloof from them in his own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast. An outcast from Heaven, Hell trembles beneath his feet, Sin and Death are at his heels, and mankind are his easy prey.

> "All is not lost; th' unconquerable will,
> And study of revenge, immortal hate,
> And courage never to submit or yield,
> And what else is not to be overcome,"

are still his. The sense of his punishment seems lost in the magnitude of it; the fierceness of tormenting flames is qualified and made innoxious by the greater fierceness of his pride; the loss of infinite happiness to himself is compensated in thought by the power of inflicting infinite misery on others. Yet Satan is not the principle of malignity, or of the abstract love of evil, but of the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate. From this principle he never once flinches. His love of power and contempt for suffering are never once relaxed from the highest pitch of intensity. His thoughts burn like a hell within him; but the power of thought holds dominion in his mind over every other consideration. The consciousness of a determined purpose, of "that intellectual being, those thoughts that wander through eternity," though accompanied with endless pain, he prefers to nonentity, to "being swallowed up and lost in the wide womb of uncreated night." He expresses the sum and substance of all ambition in one line. "Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable, doing or suffering!" After such a conflict as his, and such a defeat, to retreat in order, to rally, to make terms, to exist at all, is something; but he does more than this—he founds a new empire in hell, and from it conquers this new world, whither he bends his undaunted flight, forcing his way through nether and surrounding fires. The poet has not in all this given us a mere shadowy outline; the strength is equal to the magnitude of the conception. The Achilles of Homer is not more distinct; the Titans were not more vast; Prometheus, chained to his rock, was not a more

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terrific example of suffering and of crime. Wherever the figure of Satan is introduced, whether he walks or flies, "rising aloft incumbent on the dusky air, it is illustrated with the most striking and appropriate images: so that we see it always before us, gigantic, irregular, portentous, uneasy and disturbed—but dazzling in its faded splendour, the clouded ruins of a god. The deformity of Satan is only in the depravity of his will; he has no bodily deformity to excite our loathing or disgust. The horns and tail are not there, poor emblems of the unbending, unconquered spirit, of the writhing agonies within. Milton was too magnanimous and open an antagonist to support his argument by the by-tricks of a hump and cloven foot; to bring into the fair field of controversy the good old catholic prejudices of which Tasso and Dante have availed themselves, and which the mystic German critics would restore. He relied on the justice of his cause, and did not scruple to give the devil his due. Some persons may think that he has carried his liberality too far, and injured the cause he professed to espouse by making him the chief person in his poem. Considering the nature of his subject, he would be equally in danger of running into this fault, from his faith in religion, and his love of rebellion; and perhaps each of these motives had its full share in determining the choice of his subject.

Not only the figure of Satan, but his speeches in council, his soliloquies, his address to Eve, his share in the war in heaven, or in the fall of man, show the same decided superiority of character. To give only one instance, almost the first speech he makes:

> "Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,
> Said then the lost archangel, this the seat
> That we must change for Heaven; this mournful gloom
> For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
> Who now is sov'rain can dispose and bid
> What shall be right: farthest from him is best
> Whom reason hath equal'd, force hath made supreme
> Above his equals. Farewell happy fields,
> Where joy for ever dwells! Hail horrors, hail
> Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
> Receive thy new possessor; one who brings

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A mind not to be chang'd by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure, and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven."

The whole of the speeches and debates in Pandemonium are well worthy of the place and the occasion—with gods for speakers, and angels and archangels for hearers. There is a decided manly tone in the arguments and sentiments, an eloquent dogmatism, as if each person spoke from thorough conviction. The author might here turn his philippics against Salmasius to good account. The rout in Heaven is like the fall of some mighty structure, nodding to its base, "with hideous ruin and combustion down." But, perhaps, of all the passages in Paradise Lost, the description of the employments of the angels during the absence of Satan, some of whom "retreated in a silent valley, sing with notes angelical to many a harp their own heroic deeds and hapless fall by doom of battle," is the most perfect example of mingled pathos and sublimity.—What proves the truth of this noble picture in every part, and that the frequent complaint of want of interest in it is the fault of the reader, not of the poet, is that when any interest of a practical kind takes a shape that can be at all turned into this (and there is little doubt that Milton had some such in his eye in writing it,) each party converts it to its own purposes, feels the absolute identity of these abstracted and high speculations; and that, in fact, a noted political writer of the present day has exhausted nearly the whole account of Satan in the Paradise Lost, by applying it to a character whom he considered as, after the devil, (though I do not know whether he would make even that exception) the greatest enemy of the human race. This may serve to show that Milton's Satan is not a very insipid personage.

Of Adam and Eve it has been said that the ordinary reader

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can feel little interest in them, because they have none of the passions, pursuits, or even relations of human life, except that of man and wife, the least interesting of all others, if not to the parties concerned, at least to the by-standers. The preference has on this account been given to Homer, who, it is said, has left very vivid and infinitely diversified pictures of all the passions and affections, public and private, incident to human nature—the relations of son, of brother, parent, friend, citizen, and many others.—Longinus preferred the Iliad to the Odyssey, on account of the greater number of battles it contains; but I can neither agree to his criticism, nor assent to the present objection. It is true there is little action in this part of Milton's poem; but there is much repose, and more enjoyment. There are none of the every-day occurrences, contentions, disputes, wars, fightings, feuds, jealousies, trades, professions, liveries, and common handicrafts of life; "no kind of traffic; letters are not known; no use of service, of riches, poverty, contract, succession, bourne, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none; no occupation, no treason, felony, sword, pike, knife, gun, nor need of any engine." So much the better; thank Heaven, all these were yet to come. But still the die was cast, and in them our doom was sealed. In them

> "The generations were prepared; the pangs,
> The internal pangs, were ready, the dread strife
> Of poor humanity's afflicted will,
> Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny."

In their first false step we trace all our future woe, with loss of Eden. But there was a short and precious interval between, like the first blush of morning before the day is overcast with tempest, the dawn of the world, the birth of nature from "the unapparent deep," with its first dews and freshness on its cheek, breathing odours. Theirs was the first delicious taste of life, and on them depended all that was to come of it. In them hung trembling all our hopes and fears. They were as yet alone in the world, in the eye of nature, wondering at their new being, full of enjoyment, and enraptured with one another, with the voice of their Maker walking in the garden, and minister-

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ing angels attendant on their steps, winged messengers from heaven like rosy clouds descending in their sight. Nature played around them her virgin fancies wild; and spread for them a repast "where no crude surfeit reigned." Was there nothing in this scene, which God and nature alone witnessed, to interest a modern critic? What need was there of action, where the heart was full of bliss and innocence without it? They had nothing to do but feel their own happiness, and "know to know no more." "They toiled not, neither did they spin; yet Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." All things seem to acquire fresh sweetness, and to be clothed with fresh beauty in their sight. They tasted as it were for themselves and us, of all that there ever was pure in human bliss. "In them the burthen of the mystery, the heavy and the weary weight of all this unintelligible world, is lightened." They stood awhile perfect, but they afterwards fell, and were driven out of Paradise, tasting the first fruits of bitterness as they had done of bliss. But their pangs were such as a pure spirit might feel at the sight—their tears "such as angels weep." The pathos is of that mild contemplative kind which arises from regret for the loss of unspeakable happiness, and resignation to inevitable fate. There is none of the fierceness of intemperate passion, none of the agony of mind and turbulence of action, which is the result of the habitual struggle of the will with circumstances, irritated by repeated disappointment, and constantly setting its desires most eagerly on that which there is an impossibility of attaining. This would have destroyed the beauty of the whole picture.—They had received their unlooked-for happiness as a free gift from their Creator's hands, and they submitted to its loss, not without sorrow, but without impious and stubborn repining.

"In either hand the hast'ning angel caught
Our ling'ring parents, and to th' eastern gate
Led them direct, and down the cliff as fast
To the subjected plain; then disappear'd.
They, looking back, all th' eastern side beheld
Of Paradise, so late their happy seat,
Wav'd over by that flaming brand, the gate

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With dreadful faces throng'd, and fiery arms:
Some natural tears they dropt, but wip'd them soon;
The world was all before them, where to choose
Their place of rest, and Providence their guide." *

* In the Appendix will be found the Author's criticisms on Milton's "Eve" and "Lycidas."

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LECTURE IV.

ON DRYDEN AND POPE.

DRYDEN and Pope are the great masters of the artificial style of poetry in our language, as the poets of whom I have already treated, Chaucer, Spenser, Shakspeare, and Milton, were of the natural; and though this artificial style is generally and very justly acknowledged to be inferior to the other, yet those who stand at the head of that class ought, perhaps, to rank higher than those who occupy an inferior place in a superior class. They have a clear and independent claim upon our gratitude, as having produced a kind and degree of excellence which existed equally nowhere else. What has been done well by some later writers of the highest style of poetry, is included in, and obscured by, a greater degree of power and genius in those before them: what has been done best by poets of an entirely distinct turn of mind, stands by itself, and tells for its whole amount. Young, for instance, Gray, or Akenside, only follow in the train of Milton and Shakspeare: Pope and Dryden walk by their side, though of an unequal stature, and are entitled to a first place in the lists of fame. This seems to be not only the reason of the thing, but the common sense of mankind, who, without any regular process of reflection, judge of the merit of a work not more by its inherent and absolute worth than by its originality and capacity of gratifying a different faculty of the mind, or a different class of readers; for it should be recollected that there may be readers (as well as poets) not of the highest class, though very good sort of people, and not altogether to be despised.

The question, whether Pope was a poet, has hardly yet been settled, and is hardly worth settling; for, if he was not a great poet, he must have been a great prose-writer, that is, he was a great writer of some sort. He was a man of exquisite faculties,

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and of the most refined taste; and as he chose verse (the most obvious distinction of poetry) as the vehicle to express his ideas, he has generally passed for a poet, and a good one. If, indeed, by a great poet, we mean one who gives the utmost grandeur to our conceptions of nature, or the utmost force to the passions of the heart, Pope was not in this sense a great poet; for the bent, the characteristic power of his mind, lay the clean contrary way; namely, in representing things as they appear to the indifferent observer, stripped of prejudice and passion, as in his Critical Essays; or in representing them in the most contemptible and insignificant point of view, as in his Satires; or in clothing the little with mock-dignity, as in his poems of Fancy; or in adorning the trivial incidents and familiar relations of life with the utmost elegance of expression, and all the flattering illusions of friendship or self-love, as in his Epistles. He was not then distinguished as a poet of lofty enthusiasm, of strong imagination, with a passionate sense of the beauties of nature, or a deep insight into the workings of the heart; but he was a wit, and a critic, a man of sense, of observation, and the world, with a keen relish for the elegances of art, or of nature when embellished by art, a quick tact for propriety of thought and manners as established by the forms and customs of society, refined sympathy with the sentiments and habitudes of human life, as he felt them within the little circle of his family and friends. He was, in a word, the poet, not of nature, but of art; and the distinction between the two, as well as I can make it out, is this:—The poet of nature is one who, from the elements of beauty, of power, and of passion in his own breast, sympathises with whatever is beautiful, and grand, and impassioned in nature, in its simple majesty, in its immediate appeal to the senses, to the thoughts and hearts of all men; so that the poet of nature, by the truth, and depth, and harmony of his mind, may be said to hold communion with the very soul of nature; to be identified with, and to foreknow, and to record, the feelings of all men, at all times and places, as they are liable to the same impressions; and to exert the same power over the minds of his readers that nature does. He sees things in their eternal beauty, for he sees them as they are; he feels them in their universal interest, for he feels them as they

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affect the first principles of his and our common nature. Such was Homer, such was Shakspeare, whose works will last as long as nature, because they are a copy of the indestructible forms and everlasting impulses of nature, welling out from the bosom as from a perennial spring, or stamped upon the senses by the hand of their Maker. The power of the imagination in them is the representative power of all nature. It has its centre in the human soul, and makes the circuit of the universe.

Pope was not assuredly a poet of this class, or in the first rank of it. He saw nature only dressed by art; he judged of beauty by fashion; he sought for truth in the opinions of the world; he judged of the feelings of others by his own. The capacious soul of Shakspeare had an intuitive and mighty sympathy with whatever could enter into the heart of man in all possible circumstances: Pope had an exact knowledge of all that he himself loved or hated, wished or wanted. Milton has winged his daring flight from heaven to earth, through Chaos and old Night. Pope's Muse never wandered with safety, but from his library to his grotto, or from his grotto into his library back again. His mind dwelt with greater pleasure on his own garden than on the garden of Eden; he could describe the faultless whole-length mirror that reflected his own person better than the smooth surface of the lake that reflects the face of heaven—a piece of cut glass or a pair of paste buckles with more brilliance and effect than a thousand dew-drops glittering in the sun. He would be more delighted with a patent lamp than with "the pale reflex of Cynthia's brow," that fills the skies with its soft silent lustre, that trembles through the cottage window, and cheers the watchful mariner on the lonely wave. In short, he was the poet of personality and of polished life. That which was nearest to him was the greatest; the fashion of the day bore sway in his mind over the immutable laws of nature. He preferred the artificial to the natural in external objects, because he had a stronger fellow-feeling with the self-love of the maker or proprietor of a gewgaw than admiration of that which was interesting to all mankind. He preferred the artificial to the natural in passion, because the involuntary and uncalculating impulses of the one hurried him away with a force and vehemence with which he

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could not grapple; while he could trifle with the conventional and superficial modifications of mere sentiment at will, laugh at or admire, put them on or off like a masquerade-dress, make much or little of them, indulge them for a longer or a shorter time, as he pleased; and because, while they amused his fancy and exercised his ingenuity, they never once disturbed his vanity, his levity, or indifference. His mind was the antithesis of strength and grandeur; its power was the power of indifference. He had none of the enthusiasm of poetry; he was in poetry what the sceptic is in religion.

It cannot be denied that his chief excellence lay more in diminishing than in aggrandizing objects; in checking, not in encouraging, our enthusiasm; in sneering at the extravagances of fancy or passion, instead of giving a loose to them; in describing a row of pins and needles rather than the embattled spears of Greeks and Trojans; in penning a lampoon or a compliment, and in praising Martha Blount.

Shakspeare says,

> "———— In Fortune's ray and brightness
> The herd hath more annoyance by the brize
> Than by the tyger: but when the splitting wind
> Makes flexible the knees of knotted oaks,
> And flies fled under shade, why then
> The thing of courage,
> As roused with rage, with rage doth sympathise;
> And, with an accent tuned in the self-same key,
> Replies to chiding Fortune."

There is none of this rough work in Pope. His Muse was on a peace-establishment, and grew somewhat effeminate by long ease and indulgence. He lived in the smiles of fortune, and basked in the favour of the great. In his smooth and polished verse we meet with no prodigies of nature, but with miracles of wit; the thunders of his pen are whispered flatteries; its forked lightnings pointed sarcasms; for "the gnarled oak," he gives us "the soft myrtle:" for rocks, and seas, and mountains, artificial grass-plats, gravel-walks, and tinkling rills; for earthquakes and tempests, the breaking of a flower-pot, or the fall of a china jar;

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for the tug and war of the elements, or the deadly strife of the passions, we have

"Calm contemplation and poetic ease."

Yet within this retired and narrow circle how much, and that how exquisite, was contained! What discrimination, what wit, what delicacy, what fancy, what lurking spleen, what elegance of thought, what pampered refinement of sentiment! It is like looking at the world through a microscope, where every thing assumes a new character and a new consequence, where things are seen in their minutest circumstances and slightest shades of difference; where the little becomes gigantic, the deformed beautiful, and the beautiful deformed. The wrong end of the magnifier is, to be sure, held to every thing, but still the exhibition is highly curious, and we know not whether to be most pleased or surprised. Such, at least, is the best account I am able to give of this extraordinary man, without doing injustice to him or others. It is time to refer to particular instances in his works.—The Rape of the Lock is the best or most ingenious of these. It is the most exquisite specimen of *fillagree* work ever invented. It is admirable in proportion as it is made of nothing.

"More subtle web Arachne cannot spin,
Nor the fine nets, which oft we woven see
Of scorched dew, do not in th' air more lightly flee."

It is made of gauze and silver spangles. The most glittering appearance is given to every thing, to paste, pomatum, billet-doux, and patches. Airs, languid airs, breathe around; the atmosphere is perfumed with affectation. A toilette is described with the solemnity of an altar raised to the goddess of vanity, and the history of a silver bodkin is given with all the pomp of heraldry. No pains are spared, no profusion of ornament, no splendour of poetic diction, to set off the meanest things. The balance between the concealed irony and the assumed gravity is as nicely trimmed as the balance of power in Europe. The little is made great, and the great little. You hardly know whether to laugh or weep. It is the triumph of insignificance,

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the apotheosis of foppery and folly. It is the perfection of the mock-heroic! I will give only the two following passages in illustration of these remarks. Can any thing be more elegant and graceful than the description of Belinda, in the beginning of the second canto?

"Not with more glories, in the ethereal plain,
The sun first rises o'er the purpled main,
Than, issuing forth, the rival of his beams
Launch'd on the bottom of the silver Thames.
Fair nymphs, and well-drest youths around her shone,
But ev'ry eye was fix'd on her alone.
On her white breast a sparkling cross she wore,
Which Jews might kiss and infidels adore.
Her lively looks a sprightly mind disclose,
Quick as her eyes, and as unfix'd as those;
Favours to none, to all she smiles extends;
Oft she rejects, but never once offends.
Bright as the sun, her eyes the gazers strike;
And, like the sun, they shine on all alike,
Yet graceful ease, and sweetness void of pride,
Might hide her faults, if belles had faults to hide:
If to her share some female errors fall,
Look on her face, and you'll forget 'em all.

This nymph, to the destruction of mankind,
Nourish'd two locks, which graceful hung behind
In equal curls, and well conspir'd to deck
With shining ringlets the smooth iv'ry neck."

The following is the introduction to the account of Belinda's assault upon the baron bold, who had dissevered one of these locks "from her fair head for ever and for ever."

"Now meet thy fate, incens'd Belinda cry'd,
And drew a deadly bodkin from her side.
(The same his ancient personage to deck,
Her great, great grandsire wore about his neck,
In three seal-rings; which after, melted down,
Form'd a vast buckle for his widow's gown:
Her infant grandame's whistle next it grew,
The bells she jingled, and the whistle blew;
Then in a bodkin grac'd her mother's hairs
Which long she wore, and now Belinda wears.")

I do not know how far Pope was indebted for the original

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idea, or the delightful execution of this poem, to the Lutrin of Boileau.

The Rape of the Lock is a double-refined essence of wit and fancy, as the Essay on Criticism is of wit and sense. The quantity of thought and observation in this work, for so young a man as Pope was when he wrote it, is wonderful: unless we adopt the supposition that most men of genius spend the rest of their lives in teaching others what they themselves have learned under twenty. The conciseness and felicity of the expression are equally remarkable. Thus, on reasoning on the variety of men's opinion, he says—

> "'Tis with our judgments, as our watches; none
> Go just alike, yet each believes his own."

Nothing can be more original and happy than the general remarks and illustrations in the Essay: the critical rules laid down are too much those of a school, and of a confined one. There is one passage in the Essay on Criticism in which the author speaks with that eloquent enthusiasm of the fame of ancient writers, which those will always feel who have themselves any hope or chance of immortality. I have quoted the passage elsewhere, but I will repeat it here.

> "Still green with bays each ancient altar stands,
> Above the reach of sacrilegious hands;
> Secure from flames, from envy's fiercer rage,
> Destructive war, and all-involving age.
> Hail, bards triumphant, born in happier days,
> Immortal heirs of universal praise!
> Whose honours with increase of ages grow,
> As streams roll down, enlarging as they flow."

These lines come with double force and beauty on the reader, as they were dictated by the writer's despair of ever attaining that lasting glory which he celebrates with such disinterested enthusiasm in others, from the lateness of the age in which he lived, and from his writing in a tongue not understood by other nations, and that grows obsolete and unintelligible to ourselves at the end of every second century. But he needed not have thus antedated his own poetical doom—the loss and entire

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oblivion of that which can never die. If he had known, he might have boasted that "his little bark" wafted down the stream of time,

> "———— With *theirs* should sail,
> Pursue the triumph and partake the gale"—

if those who know how to set a due value on the blessing were not the last to decide confidently on their own pretensions to it.

There is a cant in the present day about genius, as every thing in poetry: there was a cant in the time of Pope about sense, as performing all sorts of wonders. It was a kind of watchword, the shibboleth of a critical party of the day. As a proof of the exclusive attention which it occupied in their minds, it is remarkable that in the Essay on Criticism (not a very long poem) there are no less than half a score successive couplets rhyming to the word *sense*. This appears almost incredible without giving the instances, and no less so when they are given.

"But of the two, less dangerous is the offence
To tire our patience than mislead our sense."—*lines* 3, 4.
"In search of wit these lose their common sense,
And then turns critics in their own defence."—*l.* 28, 29.
"Pride, where wit fails, steps in to our defence,
And fills up all the mighty void of sense."—*l.* 209, 10.
"Some by old words to fame have made pretence,
Ancients in phrase, mere moderns in their sense."—*l.* 324, 5.
"'Tis not enough no harshness gives offence;
The sound must seem an echo to the sense."—*l.* 364, 5.
"At every trifle scorn to take offence;
That always shows great pride or little sense."—*l.* 386, 7.
"Be silent always, when you doubt your sense,
And speak, though sure, with seeming diffidence."—*l.* 366, 7.
"Be niggards of advice on no pretence,
For the worst avarice is that of sense."—*l.* 578, 9.
"Strain out the last dull dropping of their sense,
And rhyme with all the rage of impotence."—*l.* 608, 9.
"Horace still charms with graceful negligence,
And without method talks us into sense."—*l.* 653, 4.

I have mentioned this the more for the sake of those critics who are bigotted idolisers of our author, chiefly on the score of

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his correctness. These persons seem to be of opinion that "there is but one perfect writer, even Pope." This is, however, a mistake: his excellence is by no means faultlessness. If he had no great faults, he is full of little errors. His grammatical construction is often lame and imperfect. In the Abelard and Eloise, he says—

"There died the best of passions, Love and Fame."

This is not a legitimate ellipsis. Fame is not a passion, though love is: but his ear was evidently confused by the meeting of the sounds "love and fame," as if they of themselves immediately implied, "love, and love of fame." Pope's rhymes are constantly defective, being rhymes to the eye instead of the ear; and this to a greater degree, not only than in later, but than in preceding, writers. The praise of his versification must be confined to its uniform smoothness and harmony. In the translation of the Iliad, which has been considered as his masterpiece in style and execution, he continually changes the tenses in the same sentence for the purpose of the rhyme, which shows either a want of technical resources, or great inattention to punctilious exactness. But to have done with this.

The epistle of Eloise to Abelard is the only exception, I can think of, to the general spirit of the foregoing remarks; and I should be disingenuous not to acknowledge that it is an exception. The foundation is in the letters themselves of Abelard and Eloise, which are quite as impressive, but still in a different way. It is fine as a poem: it is finer as a piece of high-wrought eloquence. No woman could be supposed to write a better love-letter in verse. Besides the richness of the historical materials, the high *gusto* of the original sentiments which Pope had to work upon, there were perhaps circumstances in his own situation which made him enter into the subject with even more than a poet's feeling. The tears shed are drops gushing from the heart: the words are burning sighs breathed from the soul of love. Perhaps the poem to which it bears the greatest similarity in our language is Dryden's Tancred and Sigismunda, taken from Boccaccio. Pope's Eloise will bear this comparison; and after such a test, with Boccaccio for the original author, and

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Dryden for the translator, it need shrink from no other. There is something exceedingly tender and beautiful in the sound of the concluding lines:

> "If ever chance two wandering lovers brings
> To Paraclete's white walls and silver springs," &c.

The Essay on Man is not Pope's best work. It is a theory which Bolingbroke is supposed to have given him, and which he expanded into verse. But "he spins the thread of his verbosity finer than the staple of his argument." All that he says, "the very words, and to the self-same tune," would prove just as well that whatever is is *wrong*, as that whatever is is *right*. The Dunciad has splendid passages, but in general it is dull, heavy, and mechanical. The sarcasm already quoted on Settle, the Lord Mayor's poet (for at that time there was a city, as well as a court, poet,)

> "Now night descending, the proud scene is o'er,
> But lives in Settle's numbers one day more,"—

is the finest inversion of immortality conceivable. It is even better than his serious apostrophe to the great heirs of glory, the triumphant bards of antiquity!

The finest burst of severe moral invective in all Pope is the prophetical conclusion of the epilogue to the Satires:

> "Virtue may chuse the high or low degree,
> 'Tis just alike to virtue, and to me;
> Dwell in a monk, or light upon a king,
> She's still the same belov'd, contented thing.
> Vice is undone, if she forgets her birth,
> And stoops from angels to the dregs of earth.
> But 'tis the fall degrades her to a whore:
> Let greatness own her, and she's mean no more.
> Her birth, her beauty, crowds and courts confess,
> Chaste matrons praise her, and grave bishops bless;
> In golden chains the willing world she draws,
> And hers the gospel is, and hers the laws;
> Mounts the tribunal, lifts her scarlet head,
> And sees pale Virtue carted in her stead.
> Lo! at the wheels of her triumphal car,
> Old England's Genius, rough with many a scar,

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Dragg'd in the dust! his arms hang idly round,
His flag inverted trains along the ground!
Our youth, all livery'd o'er with foreign gold,
Before her dance; behind her crawl the old!
See thronging millions to the Pagod run,
And offer country, parent, wife, or son!
Hear her black trumpet through the land proclaim
That *not to be corrupted is the shame.*
In soldier, churchman, patriot, man in pow'r,
'Tis av'rice all, ambition is no more!
See all our nobles begging to be slaves!
See all our fools aspiring to be knaves!
The wit of cheats, the courage of a whore,
Are what ten thousand envy and adore:
All, all look up with reverential awe
At crimes that 'scape or triumph o'er the law;
While truth, worth, wisdom, daily they decry:
Nothing is sacred now but villany.
Yet may this verse (if such a verse remain)
Show there was one who held it in disdain."

His Satires are not in general so good as his Epistles. His enmity is effeminate and petulant from a sense of weakness, as his friendship was tender from a sense of gratitude. I do not like, for instance, his character of Chartres, or his characters of women. His delicacy often borders upon sickliness; his fastidiousness makes others fastidious. But his compliments are divine; they are equal in value to a house or an estate. Take the following. In addressing Lord Mansfield, he speaks of the grave as a scene,

"Where Murray, long enough his country's pride,
Shall be no more than Tully, or than Hyde."

To Bolingbroke he says—

"Why rail they then if but one wreath of mine,
Oh all-accomplished St. John, deck thy shrine?"

Again, he has bequeathed this praise to Lord Cornbury—

"Despise low thoughts, low gains:
Disdain whatever Cornbury disdains;
Be virtuous and be happy for your pains."

One would think (though there is no knowing) that a descend-

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ant of this nobleman, if there be such a person living, could hardly be guilty of a mean or paltry action.

The finest piece of personal satire in Pope (perhaps in the world) is his character of Addison; and this, it may be observed, is of a mixed kind, made up of his respect for the man, and a cutting sense of his failings. The other finest one is that of Buckingham, and the best part of that is the pleasurable.

"——— Alas! how changed from him,
That life of pleasure and that soul of whim,
Gallant and gay, in Cliveden's proud alcove,
The bower of wanton Shrewsbury and love!"

Among his happiest and most inimitable effusions are the Epistles to Arbuthnot, and to Jervas the painter; amiable patterns of the delightful unconcerned life, blending ease with dignity, which poets and painters then led. Thus he says to Arbuthnot:

"Why did I write? What sin to me unknown
Dipp'd me in ink, my parents' or my own?
As yet a child, nor yet a fool to fame,
I lisped in numbers, for the numbers came.
I left no calling for this idle trade,
No duty broke, no father disobey'd:
The muse but serv'd to ease some friend, not wife,
To help me through this long disease, my life!
To second, Arbuthnot! thy art and care,
And teach the being you preserv'd to bear.
But why then publish? Granville the polite,
And knowing Walsh, would tell me I could write;
Well-natur'd Garth inflam'd with early praise,
And Congreve lov'd, and Swift endur'd, my lays;
The courtly Talbot, Somers, Sheffield, read;
E'en mitred Rochester would nod the head;
And St. John's self (great Dryden's friend before)
With open arms receiv'd one poet more.
Happy my studies, when by these approv'd!
Happier their author, when by these belov'd!
From these the world will judge of men and books,
Not from the Burnets, Oldmixons, and Cooks."

I cannot help giving also the conclusion of the Epistle to Jervas.

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"Oh, lasting as those colours, may they shine,
Free as thy stroke, yet faultless as thy line;
New graces yearly, like thy works, display,
Soft, without weakness, without glaring gay;
Led by some rule, that guides, but not constrains;
And finish'd more through happiness than pains,
The kindred arts shall in their praise conspire,
One dip the pencil, and one string the lyre.
Yet should the Graces all thy figures place,
And breathe an air divine on ev'ry face;
Yet should the Muses bid my numbers roll
Strong as their charms, and gentle as their soul;
With Zeuxis' Helen thy Bridgewater vie,
And these be sung till Granville's Myra die:
Alas! how little from the grave we claim!
Thou but preserv'st a face, and I a name."

And shall we cut ourselves off from beauties like these with theory? Shall we shut up our books, and seal up our senses, to please the dull spite and inordinate vanity of those "who have eyes, but they see not—ears, but they hear not—and understandings, but they understand not,"—and go about asking our blind guides whether Pope was a poet or not? It will never do. Such persons, when you point out to them a fine passage in Pope, turn it off to something of the same sort in some other writer. Thus they say that the line, "I lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came," is pretty, but taken from that of Ovid—*Et quum conabar scribere, versus erat.* They are safe in this mode of criticism: there is no danger of any one's tracing their writings to the classics.

Pope's letters and prose writings neither take away from, nor add to, his poetical reputation. There is, occasionally, a littleness of manner, and an unnecessary degree of caution. He appears anxious to say a good thing in every word, as well as every sentence. They, however, give a very favourable idea of his moral character in all respects; and his letters to Atterbury, in his disgrace and exile, do equal honour to both. If I had to choose, there are one or two persons, and but one or two, that I should like to have been, better than Pope!

Dryden was a better prose-writer, and a bolder and more varied versifier, than Pope. He was a more vigorous thinker, a

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more correct and logical declaimer, and had more of what may be called strength of mind than Pope; but he had not the same refinement and delicacy of feeling. Dryden's eloquence and spirit were possessed in a higher degree by others, and in nearly the same degree by Pope himself; but that by which Pope was distinguished was an essence which he alone possessed, and of incomparable value on that sole account. Dryden's Epistles are excellent, but inferior to Pope's, though they appear (particularly the admirable one to Congreve) to have been the model on which the latter formed his. His Satires are better than Pope's. His Absalom and Achitophel is superior, both in force of invective and discrimination of character, to anything of Pope's in the same way. The character of Achitophel is very fine; and breathes, if not a sincere love for virtue, a strong spirit of indignation against vice.

Mac Flecknoe is the origin of the idea of the Dunciad; but it is less elaborately constructed, less feeble, and less heavy. The difference between Pope's satirical portraits and Dryden's appears to be this, in a good measure, that Dryden seems to grapple with his antagonists, and to describe real persons; Pope seems to refine upon them in his own mind, and to make them out just what he pleases, till they are not real characters, but the mere driveling effusions of his spleen and malice. Pope describes the thing, and then goes on describing his own description till he loses himself in verbal repetitions. Dryden recurs to the object often, takes fresh sittings of nature, and gives us new strokes of character as well as of his pencil. The Hind and Panther is an allegory as well as a satire; and so far it tells less home; the battery is not so point-blank. But otherwise it has more genius, vehemence, and strength of description, than any other of Dryden's works, not excepting the Absalom and Achitophel. It also contains the finest examples of varied and sounding versification. I will quote the following as an instance of what I mean. He is complaining of the treatment which the Papists, under James II., received from the church of England.

"Besides these jolly birds, whose corpse impure
Repaid their commons with their salt manure,

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Another farm he had behind his house,
Not overstocked, but barely for his use;
Wherein his poor domestic poultry fed,
And from his pious hand 'received their bread.'
Our pampered pigeons, with malignant eyes,
Beheld these inmates and their nurseries;
Though hard their fare, at evening, and at morn,
(A cruise of water, and an ear of corn,)
Yet still they grudged that *modicum*, and thought
A sheaf in every single grain was brought.
Fain would they filch that little food away,
While unrestrained those happy gluttons prey;
And much they grieved to see so nigh their hall,
The bird that warned St. Peter of his fall;
That he should raise his mitred crest on high,
And clap his wings, and call his family
To sacred rites; and vex the ethereal powers
With midnight matins at uncivil hours;
Nay more, his quiet neighbours should molest
Just in the sweetness of their morning rest.
Beast of a bird! supinely when he might
Lie snug and sleep, to rise before the light!
What if his dull forefathers us'd that cry,
Could he not let a bad example die?
The world was fallen into an easier way:
This age knew better than to fast and pray.
Good sense in sacred worship would appear,
So to begin as they might end the year.
Such feats in former times had wrought the falls
Of crowing chanticleers in cloister'd walls.
Expell'd for this, and for their lands, they fled;
And sister Partlet with her hooded head
Was hooted hence, because she would not pray a-bed."

There is a magnanimity of abuse in some of these epithets, a fearless choice of topics of invective, which may be considered as the heroical in satire.

The *Annus Mirabilis* is a tedious performance; it is a tissue of far-fetched, heavy, lumbering conceits, and in the worst style of what has been denominated metaphysical poetry. His Odes in general are of the same stamp; they are the hard-strained offspring of a meagre, meretricious fancy. The famous Ode on St. Cecilia deserves its reputation; for, as a piece of poetical mechanism to be set to music, or recited in alternate strophe and

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antistrophe, with classical allusions, and flowing verse, nothing can be better. It is equally fit to be said or sung; it is not equally good to read. It is lyrical, without being epic or dramatic. For instance, the description of Bacchus,

> "The jolly god in triumph comes,
> Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;
> Flush'd with a purple grace,
> He shows his honest face,"—

does not answer, as it ought, to our idea of the god, returning from the conquest of India, with satyrs and wild beasts, that he had tamed, following in his train; crowned with vine leaves, and riding in a chariot drawn by leopards—such as we have seen him painted by Titian or Rubens! Lyrical poetry, of all others, bears the nearest resemblance to painting: it deals in hieroglyphics and passing figures, which depend for effect, not on the working out, but on the selection. It is the dance and pantomime of poetry. In variety and rapidity of movement, the Alexander's Feast has all that can be required in this respect; it only wants loftiness and truth of character.

Dryden's plays are better than Pope could have written; for though he does not go out of himself by the force of imagination, he goes out of himself by the force of common-places and rhetorical dialogue. On the other hand, they are not so good as Shakspeare's; but he has left the best character of Shakspeare that has ever been written.*

* "To begin, then, with Shakspeare: he was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient, poets had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously, but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it, too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learned; he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature; he looked inwards and found her there. I cannot say he is everywhere alike; were he so, I should do him injury to compare him with the greatest of mankind. He is many times flat and insipid: his comic wit degenerating into clenches, his serious, swelling into bombast. But he is always great when some great occasion is presented to him. No man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not then raise himself as high above the rest of poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter Viburna Cupressi."

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His alterations from Chaucer and Boccaccio show a greater knowledge of the taste of his readers, and power of pleasing them, than acquaintance with the genius of his authors. He ekes out the lameness of the verse in the former, and breaks the force of the passion in both. The Tancred and Sigismunda is the only general exception, in which, I think, he has fully retained, if not improved upon, the impassioned declamation of the original. The Honoria has none of the bewildered, dreary, preternatural effect of Boccaccio's story. Nor has the Flower and the Leaf any thing of the enchanting simplicity and concentrated feeling of Chaucer's romantic fiction. Dryden, however, sometimes seemed to indulge himself as well as his readers, as in keeping entire that noble line in Palamon's address to Venus:

"Thou gladder of the mount of Citheron!"

His Tales have been, upon the whole, the most popular of his works; and I should think that a translation of some of the other serious tales in Boccaccio and Chaucer, as that of Isabella, the Falcon, of Constance, the Prioress's Tale, and others, if executed with taste and spirit, could not fail to succeed in the present day.

It should appear, in tracing the history of our literature, that poetry had, at the period of which we are speaking, in general declined, by successive gradations, from the poetry of imagination, in the time of Elizabeth, to the poetry of fancy (to adopt a modern distinction) in the time of Charles I.; and again from the poetry of fancy to that of wit, as in the reign of Charles II. and Queen Anne. It degenerated into the poetry of mere common places, both in style and thought, in the succeeding reigns: as in the latter part of the last century, it was transformed, by means of the French Revolution, into the poetry of paradox.

Of Donne I know nothing but some beautiful verses to his wife, dissuading her from accompanying him on his travels abroad, and some quaint riddles in verse, which the Sphinx could not unravel.

Waller still lives in the name of Sacharissa; and his lines

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on the death of Oliver Cromwell show that he was a man not without genius and strength of thought.

Marvel is a writer of nearly the same period, and worthy of a better age. Some of his verses are harsh as the words of Mercury; others musical as is Apollo's lute. Of the latter kind are his boat-song, his description of a fawn, and his lines to Lady Vere. His lines prefixed to Paradise Lost are by no means the most favourable specimen of his powers.

Butler's Hudibras is a poem of more wit than any other in the language. The rhymes have as much genius in them as the thoughts; but there is no story in it, and but little humour. Humour is the making others act or talk absurdly and unconsciously: wit is the pointing out and ridiculing that absurdity consciously, and with more or less ill-nature. The fault of Butler's poem is not that it has too much wit, but that it has not an equal quantity of other things. One would suppose that the starched manners and sanctified grimace of the times in which he lived would of themselves have been sufficiently rich in ludicrous incidents and characters; but they seem rather to have irritated his spleen than to have drawn forth his powers of picturesque imitation. Certainly, if we compare Hudibras with Don Quixote in this respect, it seems rather a meagre and unsatisfactory performance.

Rochester's poetry is the poetry of wit combined with the love of pleasure, of thought with licentiousness. His extravagant heedless levity has a sort of passionate enthusiasm in it; his contempt for everything that others respect almost amounts to sublimity. His poem upon Nothing is itself no trifling work. His epigrams were the bitterest, the least laboured, and the truest, that ever were written.

Sir John Suckling was of the same mercurial stamp, but with a greater fund of animal spirits; as witty, but less malicious. His Ballad on a Wedding is perfect in its kind, and has a spirit of high enjoyment in it, of sportive fancy, a liveliness of description, and a truth of nature, that never were surpassed. It is superior to either Gay or Prior; for with all their *naiveté* and terseness, it has a Shakspearian grace and luxuriance about it which they could not have reached.

Denham and Cowley belong to the same period, but were

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quite distinct from each other: the one was grave and prosing, the other melancholy and fantastical. There are a number of good lines and good thoughts in the "Cooper's Hill." And in Cowley there is an inexhaustible fund of sense and ingenuity, buried in inextricable conceits, and entangled in the cobwebs of the schools. He was a great man, not a great poet. But I shall say no more on this subject. I never wish to meddle with names that are sacred, unless when they stand in the way of things that are more sacred.

Withers is a name now almost forgotten, and his works seldom read; but his poetry is not unfrequently distinguished by a tender and pastoral turn of thought; and there is one passage of exquisite feeling, describing the consolations of poetry in the following terms:

"She doth tell me where to borrow
Comfort in the midst of sorrow;
Makes the desolatest place *
To her presence be a grace;
And the blackest discontents
Be her fairest ornaments,
In my former days of bliss
Her divine skill taught me this,
That from everything I saw
I could some invention draw;
And raise pleasure to her height,
Through the meanest object's sight;—
By the murmur of a spring,
Or the least bough's rusteling,
By a daisy whose leaves spread
Shut when Titan goes to bed;
Or a shady bush or tree,
She could more infuse in me
Than all Nature's beauties can
In some other wiser man.
By her help I also now
Make this churlish place allow
Some things that may sweeten gladness
In the very gall of sadness.
The dull loneness, the black shade,
That these hanging vaults have made,

* Written in the Fleet Prison.

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The strange music of the waves,
Beating on these hollow caves,
This black den which rocks emboss,
Overgrown with eldest moss,
The rude portals that give light
More to terror than delight,
This my chamber of neglect,
Wall'd about with disrespect,
From all these and this dull air,
A fit object for despair,
She hath taught me by her might
To draw comfort and delight.
Therefore, thou best earthly bliss,
I will cherish thee for this.
Poesie, thou sweet'st content
That e'er Heaven to mortals lent,
Though they as a trifle leave thee,
Whose dull thoughts cannot conceive thee,
Though thou be to them a scorn,
That to nought but earth are born,
Let my life no longer be
Than I am in love with thee.
Though our wise ones call thee madness,
Let me never taste of sadness
If I love not thy maddest fits
Above all their greatest wits.
And though some too seeming holy
Do account thy raptures folly,
Thou dost teach me to contemn
What makes knaves and fools of them."

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LECTURE V.

ON THOMSON AND COWPER.

THOMSON, the kind-hearted Thomson, was the most indolent of mortals and of poets. But he was also one of the best both of mortals and of poets. Dr. Johnson makes it his praise that he wrote "no line which dying he would wish to blot." Perhaps a better proof of his honest simplicity, and inoffensive goodness of disposition, would be that he wrote no line which any other person living would wish that he should blot. Indeed, he himself wished, on his death-bed, formally to expunge his dedication of one of the Seasons to that finished courtier, and candid biographer of his own life, Bubb Doddington. As critics, however, not as moralists, we might say, on the other hand—"Would he had blotted a thousand!" The same suavity of temper and sanguine warmth of feeling which threw such a natural grace and genial spirit of enthusiasm over his poetry was also the cause of his inherent vices and defects. He is affected through carelessness: pompous from unsuspecting simplicity of character. He is frequently pedantic and ostentatious in his style, because he had no consciousness of these vices in himself. He mounts upon stilts, not out of vanity, but indolence. He seldom writes a good line but he makes up for it by a bad one. He takes advantage of all the most trite and mechanical common-places of imagery and diction as a kindly relief to his Muse, and as if he thought them quite as good, and likely to be quite as acceptable to the reader, as his own poetry. He did not think the difference worth putting himself to the trouble of accomplishing. He had too little art to conceal his art: or did not even seem to know that there was any occasion for it. His art is as naked and undisguised as his nature; the one is as pure and genuine as the other is gross, gaudy, and meretricious. All that is admi-

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rable in the Seasons is the emanation of a fine natural genius, and sincere love of his subject, unforced, unstudied, that comes uncalled for, and departs unbidden. But he takes no pains, uses no self-correction; or if he seems to labour, it is worse than labour lost. His genius "cannot be constrained by mastery." The feeling of nature, of the changes of the seasons, was in his mind; and he could not help conveying this feeling to the reader, by the mere force of spontaneous expression; but if the expression did not come of itself, he left the whole business to chance; or, willing to evade, instead of encountering the difficulties of his subject, fills up the intervals of true inspiration with the most vapid and worthless materials, pieces out a beautiful half line with a bombastic allusion, or overloads an exquisitely natural sentiment or image with a cloud of painted, pompous, cumbrous phrases, like the shower of roses, in which he represents the Spring, his own lovely, fresh, and innocent Spring, as descending to the earth:

> "Come, gentle Spring! ethereal Mildness! come,
> And from the bosom of yon drooping cloud,
> While music wakes around, veil'd in a shower
> Of shadowing roses, on our plains descend."

Who, from such a flimsy, round-about, unmeaning commencement as this, would expect the delightful, unexaggerated, home-felt descriptions of natural scenery, which are scattered in such unconscious profusion through this and the following cantos! For instance, the very next passage is crowded with a set of striking images.

> "And see where surly Winter passes off
> Far to the north, and calls his ruffian blasts:
> His blasts obey, and quit the howling hill,
> The shatter'd forest, and the ravag'd vale;
> While softer gales succeed, at whose kind touch
> Dissolving snows in livid torrents lost,
> The mountains lift their green heads to the sky.
> As yet the trembling year is unconfirm'd,
> And Winter oft at eve resumes the breeze,
> Chills the pale morn, and bids his driving sleets
> Deform the day delightless; so that scarce
> The bittern knows his time with bill ingulpht

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To shake the sounding marsh, or from the shore
The plovers when to scatter o'er the heath,
And sing their wild notes to the list'ning waste."

Thomson is the best of our descriptive poets; for he gives most of the poetry of natural description. Others have been quite equal to him, or have surpassed him, as Cowper for instance, in the picturesque part of his art, in marking the peculiar features and curious details of objects;—no one has yet come up to him in giving the sum total of their effects, their varying influences on the mind. He does not go into the *minutiæ* of a landscape, but describes the vivid impression which the whole makes upon his own imagination; and thus transfers the same unbroken, unimpaired impression to the imagination of his readers. The colours with which he paints seem yet breathing, like those of the living statue in the Winter's Tale. Nature in his descriptions is seen growing around us, fresh and lusty as in itself. We feel the effect of the atmosphere, its humidity or clearness, its heat or cold, the glow of summer, the gloom of winter, the tender promise of the spring, the full overshadowing foliage, the declining pomp and deepening tints of autumn. He transports us to the scorching heat of vertical suns, or plunges us into the chilling horrors and desolation of the frozen zone. We hear the snow drifting against the broken casement without, and see the fire blazing on the hearth within. The first scattered drops of a vernal shower patter on the leaves above our heads, or the coming storm resounds through the leafless groves. In a word, he describes not to the eye alone, but to the other senses, and to the whole man. He puts his heart into his subject, writes as he feels, and humanises whatever he touches. He makes all his descriptions teem with life and vivifying soul. His faults were those of his style—of the author and the man; but the original genius of the poet, the pith and marrow of his imagination, the fine natural mould in which his feelings were bedded, were too much for him to counteract by neglect, or affectation, or false ornaments. It is for this reason that he is, perhaps, the most popular of all our poets, treating of a subject that all can understand, and in a way that is interesting to all alike, to the ignorant or the refined, because he gives back the im-

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pression which the things themselves make upon us in nature. "That," said a man of genius, seeing a little shabby soiled copy of Thomson's Seasons lying on the window-seat of an obscure country alehouse—"That is true fame!"

It has been supposed by some that the Castle of Indolence is Thomson's best poem; but that is not the case. He has in it, indeed, poured out the whole soul of indolence, diffuse, relaxed, supine, dissolved into a voluptuous dream; and surrounded himself with a set of objects and companions in entire unison with the listlessness of his own temper. Nothing can well go beyond the descriptions of these inmates of the place, and their luxurious pampered way of life—of him who came among them like "a burnished fly in month of June," but soon left them on his heedless way; and him,

> "For whom the merry bells had rung, I ween,
> If in this nook of quiet bells had ever been."

The in-door quiet and cushioned ease, where "all was one full-swelling bed;" the out-of-door stillness, broken only by "the stock-dove's plaint amid the forest deep,

> "That drowsy rustled to the sighing gale,"—

are in the most perfect and delightful keeping. But still there are no passages in this exquisite little production of sportive ease and fancy, equal to the best of those in the Seasons. Warton, in his Essay on Pope, was the first to point out and do justice to some of these; for instance, to the description of the effects of the contagion among our ships at Carthagena—"of the frequent corse heard nightly plunged amid the sullen waves," and to the description of the pilgrims lost in the deserts of Arabia. This last passage, profound and striking as it is, is not free from those faults of style which I have already noticed:

> "——— Breath'd hot
> From all the boundless furnace of the sky,
> And the wide-glitt'ring waste of burning sand,
> A suffocating wind the pilgrim smites
> With instant death. Patient of thirst and toil,
> Son of the desert, ev'n the camel feels
> Shot through his wither'd heart the fiery blast."

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Or from the black-red ether, bursting broad,
Sallies the sudden whirlwind. Straight the sands,
Commov'd around, in gath'ring eddies play;
Nearer and nearer still they dark'ning come,
Till with the gen'ral all-involving storm
Swept up, the whole continuous wilds arise,
And by their noon-day fount dejected thrown,
Or sunk at night in sad disastrous sleep,
Beneath descending hills the caravan
Is buried deep. In Cairo's crowded streets,
Th' impatient merchant, wond'ring, waits in vain;
And Mecca saddens at the long delay."

There are other passages of equal beauty with these; such as that of the hunted stag, followed by "the inhuman rout,"

"———That from the shady depth
Expel him, circling through his ev'ry shift.
He sweeps the forest oft, and, sobbing, sees
The glades mild op'ning to the golden day,
Where in kind contest with his butting friends
He wont to struggle, or his loves enjoy."

The whole of the description of the frozen zone, in the Winter, is perhaps even finer and more thoroughly felt, as being done from early associations, than that of the torrid zone in his Summer. Anything more beautiful than the following account of the Siberian exiles is, I think, hardly to be found in the whole range of poetry.

"There through the prison of unbounded wilds,
Barr'd by the hand of nature from escape,
Wide roams the Russian exile. Nought around
Strikes his sad eye but deserts lost in snow,
And heavy-loaded groves, and solid floods,
That stretch athwart the solitary vast
Their icy horrors to the frozen main;
And cheerless towns far distant, never bless'd,
Save when its annual course the caravan
Bends to the golden coast of rich Cathay,
With news of human kind."

The feeling of loneliness, of distance, of lingering, slow-revolving years of pining expectation, of desolation within and without the heart, was never more finely expressed than it is here.

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The account which follows of the employments of the Polar night—of the journeys of the natives by moonlight, drawn by rein-deer, and of the return of spring in Lapland—

> "Where pure Niemi's fairy mountains rise,
> And fring'd with roses Tenglio rolls his stream,"

is equally picturesque and striking in a different way. The traveller lost in the snow, is a well known and admirable dramatic episode. I prefer, however, giving one example of our author's skill in painting common domestic scenery, as it will bear a more immediate comparison with the style of some later writers on such subjects. It is of little consequence what passage we take. The following description of the first setting in of winter is, perhaps as pleasing as any:

> "Through the hush'd air the whitening shower descends,
> At first thin wav'ring, till at last the flakes
> Fall broad and wide, and fast, dimming the day
> With a continual flow. The cherish'd fields
> Put on their winter-robe of purest white:
> 'Tis brightness all, save where the new snow melts
> Along the mazy current. Low the woods
> Bow their hoar head; and ere the languid Sun,
> Faint, from the West emits his ev'ning ray,
> Earth's universal face, deep hid, and chill,
> Is one wide dazzling waste, that buries wide
> The works of man. Drooping, the lab'rer-ox
> Stands cover'd o'er with snow, and then demands
> The fruit of all his toil. The fowls of heaven,
> Tam'd by the cruel season, crowd around
> The winnowing store, and claim the little boon
> Which Providence assigns them. One alone,
> The red-breast, sacred to the household Gods,
> Wisely regardful of the embroiling sky,
> In joyless fields and thorny thickets leaves
> His shivering mates, and pays to trusted man
> His annual visit. Half-afraid, he first
> Against the window beats; then, brisk, alights
> On the warm hearth; then hopping o'er the floor,
> Eyes all the smiling family askance,
> And pecks, and starts, and wonders where he is:
> Till, more familiar grown, the table-crumbs
> Attract his slender feet. The foodless wilds

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Pour forth their brown inhabitants. The hare,
Though timorous of heart, and hard beset
By death in various forms, dark snares and dogs,
And more unpitying men, the garden seeks,
Urg'd on by fearless want. The bleating kind
Eye the bleak heav'n, and next the glist'ning earth
With looks of dumb despair; then, sad dispers'd,
Dig for the wither'd herb through heaps of snow."

It is thus that Thomson always give a *moral sense* to nature.

Thomson's blank verse is not harsh, nor utterly untuneable; but it is heavy and monotonous; it seems always labouring uphill. The selections which have been made from his works in Enfield's Speaker, and other books of extracts, do not convey the most favourable idea of his genius or taste; such as Palemon and Lavinia, Damon and Musidora, Celadon and Amelia. Those parts of any author which are most liable to be stitched in worsted, and framed and glazed, are not by any means always the best. The moral descriptions and reflections in the Seasons are in an admirable spirit, and written with great force and fervour.

His poem on Liberty is not equally good: his Muse was too easy and good-natured for the subject, which required as much indignation against unjust and arbitrary power, as complacency in the constitutional monarchy, under which, just after the expulsion of the Stuarts and the establishment of the House of Hanover, in contempt of the claims of hereditary pretenders to the throne, Thomson lived. Thomson was but an indifferent hater; and the most indispensable part of the love of liberty has unfortunately hitherto been the hatred of tyranny. Spleen is the soul of patriotism, and of public good: but you would not expect a man who has been seen eating peaches off a tree with both hands in his waistcoat pockets, to be "overrun with the spleen," or to heat himself needlessly about an abstract proposition.

His plays are liable to the same objection. They are never acted, and seldom read. The author could not, or would not, put himself out of his way, to enter into the situations and passions of others, particularly of a tragic kind. The subject of Tancred and Sigismunda, which is taken from a serious episode

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in Gil Blas, is an admirable one, but poorly handled: the ground may be considered as still unoccupied.

Cowper, whom I shall speak of in this connection, lived at a considerable distance of time after Thomson; and had some advantages over him, particularly in simplicity of style, in a certain precision and minuteness of graphical description, and in a more careful and leisurely choice of such topics only as his genius and peculiar habits of mind prompted him to treat of. The Task has fewer blemishes than the Seasons; but it has not the same capital excellence, the "unbought grace" of poetry, the power of moving and infusing the warmth of the author's mind into that of the reader. If Cowper had a more polished taste, Thomson had, beyond comparison, a more fertile genius, more impulsive force, a more entire forgetfulness of himself in his subject. If in Thomson you are sometimes offended with the slovenliness of the author by profession, determined to get through his task at all events; in Cowper you are no less dissatisfied with the finicalness of the private gentleman, who does not care whether he completes his work or not; and, in whatever he does, is evidently more solicitous to please himself than the public. There is an effeminacy about him, which shrinks from and repels common and hearty sympathy. With all his boasted simplicity and love of the country, he seldom launches out into general descriptions of nature: he looks at her over his clipped hedges, and from his well-swept garden-walks; or if he makes a bolder experiment now and then, it is with an air of precaution, as if he were afraid of being caught in a shower of rain, or of not being able, in case of any untoward accident, to make good his retreat home. He shakes hands with nature with a pair of fashionable gloves on, and leads his "Vashti" forth to public view with a look of consciousness and attention to etiquette, as a fine gentleman hands a lady out to dance a minuet. He is delicate to fastidiousness, and glad to get back, after a romantic adventure with crazy Kate, a party of gypsies or a little child on a common, to the drawing-room and the ladies again, to the sofa and the tea-kettle—No, I beg his pardon, not to the singing, well-scoured tea-kettle, but to the polished and loud-hissing urn. His walks

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and arbours are kept clear of worms and snails, with as much an appearance of *petit-maitreship* as of humanity. He has some of the sickly sensibilities and pampered refinements of Pope; but then Pope prided himself in them: whereas Cowper affects to be all simplicity and plainness. He had neither Thomson's love of the unadorned beauties of nature, nor Pope's exquisite sense of the elegances of art. He was, in fact a nervous man, afraid of trusting himself to the seductions of the one, and ashamed of putting forward his pretensions to an intimacy with the other: but to be a coward is not the way to succeed either in poetry, in war, or in love! Still he is a genuine poet, and deserves all his reputation. His worst vices are amiable weaknesses, elegant trifling. Though there is a frequent dryness, timidity, and jejuneness in his manner, he has left a number of pictures of domestic comfort and social refinement, as well as of natural imagery and feeling, which can hardly be forgotten but with the language itself. Such, among others, are his memorable description of the post coming in, that of the preparations for tea in a winter's evening in the country, of the unexpected fall of snow, of the frosty morning (with the fine satirical transition to the Empress of Russia's palace of ice,) and, most of all, the winter's walk at noon. Every one of these may be considered as distinct studies, or highly-finished cabinet-pieces arranged without order or coherence. I shall be excused for giving the last of them, as what has always appeared to me one of the most feeling, elegant, and perfect specimens of this writer's manner.

"The night was winter in his roughest mood;
The morning sharp and clear. But now at noon
Upon the southern side of the slant hills,
And where the woods fence off the northern blast,
The season smiles, resigning all its rage,
And has the warmth of May. The vault is blue,
Without a cloud, and white without a speck
The dazzling splendour of the scene below.
Again the harmony comes o'er the vale;
And through the trees I view th' embattled tow'r,
Whence all the music, I again perceive
The soothing influence of the wafted strains,
And settle in soft musings as I tread

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The walk, still verdant, under oaks and elms,
Whose outspread branches overarch the glade.
The roof, though moveable through all its length,
As the wind sways it, has yet well suffic'd,
And, intercepting in their silent fall
The frequent flakes, has kept a path for me.
No noise is here, or none that hinders thought.
The redbreast warbles still, but is content
With slender notes, and more than half suppress'd.
Pleas'd with his solitude, and flitting light
From spray to spray, where'er he rests he shakes
From many a twig the pendent drops of ice
That tinkle in the wither'd leaves below.
Stillness, accompanied with sounds so soft,
Charms more than silence. Meditation here
May think down hours to moments. Here the heart
May give a useful lesson to the head,
And Learning wiser grow without his books.
Knowledge and Wisdom, far from being one,
Have oft-times no connection. Knowledge dwells
In heads replete with thoughts of other men;
Wisdom in minds attentive to their own.
Books are not seldom talismans and spells,
By which the magic art of shrewder wits
Holds an unthinking multitude enthrall'd.
Some to the fascination of a name
Surrender judgment hood-wink'd. Some the style
Infatuates, and through labyrinths and wilds
Of error leads them, by a tune entranc'd.
While sloth seduces more, too weak to bear
The insupportable fatigue of thought,
And swallowing therefore, without pause or choice
The total grist unsifted, husks and all.
But trees, and rivulets whose rapid course
Defies the check of winter, haunts of deer,
And sheep-walks populous with bleating lambs,
And lanes, in which the primrose ere her time
Peeps through the moss that clothes the hawthorn root,
Deceive no student. Wisdom there, and truth,
Not shy, as in the world, and to be won
By slow solicitation, seize at once
The roving thought, and fix it on themselves."

His satire is also excellent. It is pointed and forcible, with the polished manners of the gentleman, and the honest indignation

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of the virtuous man. His religious poetry, except where it takes a tincture of controversial heat, wants elevation and fire. His Muse had not a seraph's wing. I might refer, in illustration of this opinion, to the laboured anticipation of the Millennium at the end of the sixth book. He could describe a piece of shell-work as well as any modern poet: but he could not describe the New Jerusalem so well as John Bunyan;—nor are his verses on Alexander Selkirk so good as Robinson Crusoe. The one is not so much like a vision, nor is the other so much like the reality.

The first volume of Cowper's poems has, however, been less read than it deserved. The comparison in these poems of the proud and humble believer to the peacock and the pheasant, and the parallel between Voltaire and the poor cottager, are exquisite pieces of eloquence and poetry, particularly the last:

"Yon cottager, who weaves at her own door,
Pillow and bobbins all her little store;
Content though mean, and cheerful if not gay,
Shuffling her threads about the live-long day,
Just earns a scanty pittance, and at night,
Lies down secure, her heart and pocket light;
She, for her humble sphere by nature fit,
Has little understanding, and no wit,
Receives no praise; but, though her lot be such,
(Toilsome and indigent) she renders much;
Just knows, and knows no more, her Bible true—
A truth the brilliant Frenchman never knew;
And in that charter reads with sparkling eyes
Her title to a treasure in the skies.

O happy peasant! Oh unhappy bard!
His the mere tinsel, hers the rich reward;
He prais'd, perhaps, for ages yet to come,
She never heard of half a mile from home:
He lost in errors his vain heart prefers,
She safe in the simplicity of hers."

His character of Whitfield, in the poem on Hope, is one of the most spirited and striking things. It is written *con amore*.

"But if, unblameable in word and thought,
A man arise, a man whom God has taught,
With all Elijah's dignity of tone,
And all the love of the beloved John,

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To storm the citadels they built in air,
To smite the untemper'd wall ('tis death to spare,)
To sweep away all refuges of lies,
And place, instead of quirks themselves devise,
Lama Sabachthani before their eyes;
To show that without Christ all gain is loss,
All hope despair that stands not on his cross;
Except a few his God may have impress'd,
A tenfold phrensy seizes all the rest."

These lines were quoted, soon after their appearance, by the Monthly Reviewers, to show that Cowper was no poet, though they afterwards took credit to themselves for having been the first to introduce his verses to the notice of the public. It is not a little remarkable that these same critics regularly damned, at its first coming out, every work which has since acquired a standard reputation with the public. Cowper's verses on his mother's picture, and his lines to Mary, are some of the most pathetic that ever were written. His stanzas on the loss of the Royal George have a masculine strength and feeling beyond what was usual with him. The story of John Gilpin has perhaps given as much pleasure to as many people as anything of the same length that ever was written.

His life was an unhappy one. It was embittered by a morbid affection, and by his religious sentiments. Nor are we to wonder at this, or bring it as a charge against religion; for it is the nature of the poetical temperament to carry everything to excess, whether it be love, religion, pleasure, or pain, as we may see in the case of Cowper and of Burns, and to find torment or rapture in that in which others merely find a resource from *ennui*, or a relaxation from common occupation.

There are two poets still living who belong to the same class of excellence, and of whom I shall here say a few words; I mean Crabbe, and Robert Bloomfield, the author of the Farmer's Boy. As a painter of simple natural scenery, and of the still life of the country, few writers have more undeniable and unassuming pretensions than the ingenious and self-taught poet last mentioned. Among the sketches of this sort I would mention, as equally distinguished for delicacy, faithfulness, and *naïveté*, his description of lambs racing, of the pigs going out an

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acorning, of the boy sent to feed his sheep before the break of day in winter; and I might add the innocently told story of the poor bird-boy, who in vain through the live-long day expects his promised companions at his hut, to share his feast of roasted sloes with him, as an example of that humble pathos in which this author excels. The fault indeed of his genius is that it is too humble: his Muse has something not only rustic, but menial in her aspect. He seems afraid of elevating nature, lest she should be ashamed of him. Bloomfield very beautifully describes the lambs in spring-time as racing round the hillocks of green turf: Thomson, in describing the same image, makes the mound of earth the remains of an old Roman encampment. Bloomfield never gets beyond his own experience; and that is somewhat confined. He gives the simple appearance of nature, but he gives it naked, shivering, and unclothed with the drapery of a mortal imagination. His poetry has much the effect of the first approach of spring, "while yet the year is unconfirmed," where a few tender buds venture forth here and there, but are chilled by the early frosts and nipping breath of poverty. It should seem from this and other instances that have occurred within the last century, that we cannot expect from original genius alone, without education, in modern and more artificial periods, the same bold and independent results as in former periods. And one reason appears to be that, though such persons, from whom we might at first expect a restoration of the good old times of poetry, are not encumbered and enfeebled by the trammels of custom, and the dull weight of other men's ideas; yet they are oppressed by the consciousness of a want of the common advantages which others have; are looking at the tinsel finery of the age, while they neglect the rich unexplored mine in their own breasts; and, instead of setting an example for the world to follow, spend their lives in aping, or in the despair of aping, the hackneyed accomplishments of their inferiors. Another cause may be, that original genius alone is not sufficient to produce the highest excellence, without a corresponding state of manners, passions, and religious belief: that no single mind can move in direct opposition to the vast machine of the world around it; that the poet can do no more than stamp the

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mind of his age upon his works; and that all that the ambition of the highest genius can hope to arrive at, after the lapse of one or two generations, is the perfection of that more refined and effeminate style of studied elegance and adventitious ornament, which is the result, not of nature, but of art. In fact, no other style of poetry has succeeded, or seems likely to succeed, in the present day. The public taste hangs like a millstone round the neck of all original genius that does not conform to established and exclusive models. The writer is not only without popular sympathy, but without a rich and varied mass of materials for his mind to work upon and assimilate unconsciously to itself; his attempts at originality are looked upon as affectation, and in the end degenerate into it from the natural spirit of contradiction, and the constant uneasy sense of disappointment and undeserved ridicule. But to return.

Crabbe is, if not the most natural, the most literal of our descriptive poets. He exhibits the smallest circumstances of the smallest things. He gives the very costume of meanness; the non-essentials of every trifling incident. He is his own landscape-painter, and engraver too. His pastoral scenes seem pricked on paper in little dotted lines. He describes the interior of a cottage like a person sent there to distrain for rent. He has an eye to the number of arms in an old worm-eaten chair, and takes care to inform himself and the reader whether a joint-stool stands upon three legs or upon four. If a settle by the fire-side stands awry, it gives him as much disturbance as a tottering world; and he records the rent in a ragged counterpane as an event in history. He is equally curious in his back-grounds and in his figures. You know the christian and surnames of every one of his heroes,—the dates of their achievements, whether on a Sunday or a Monday,—their place of birth and burial, the colour of their clothes, and of their hair, and whether they squinted or not. He takes an inventory of the human heart exactly in the same manner as of the furniture of a sick room: his sentiments have very much the air of fixtures: he gives you the petrifaction of a sigh, and carves a tear, to the life, in stone. Almost all his characters are tired of their lives, and you heartily wish them dead They remind one of anatomical preservations;

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or may be said to bear the same relation to actual life that a stuffed cat in a glass-case does to the real one purring on the hearth: the skin is the same, but the life and sense of heat is gone. Crabbe's poetry is like a museum, or curiosity-shop: everything has the same posthumous appearance, the same inanimateness and identity of character. If Bloomfield is too much of the Farmer's Boy, Crabbe is too much of the parish beadle, an overseer of the country poor. He has no delight beyond the walls of a workhouse, and his officious zeal would convert the world into a vast infirmary. He is a kind of Ordinary, not of Newgate, but of nature. His poetical morality is taken from Burn's Justice, or the Statutes against Vagrants. He sets his own imagination in the stocks, and his Muse, like Malvolio, "wears cruel garters." He collects all the petty vices of the human heart, and superintends, as in a panopticon, a select circle of rural malefactors. He makes-out the poor to be as bad as the rich—a sort of vermin for the others to hunt down and trample upon, and this he thinks a good piece of work. With him there are but two moral categories, riches and poverty, authority and dependence. His parish apprentice, Richard Monday, and his wealthy baronet, Sir Richard Monday, of Monday-place, are the same individual—the extremes of the same character, and of his whole system. "The latter end of his Commonwealth does not forget the beginning." But his parish ethics are the very worst model for a state: anything more degrading and helpless cannot well be imagined. He exhibits just the contrary view of human life to that which Gay has done in his Beggar's Opera. In a word, Crabbe is the only poet who has attempted and succeeded in the *still life* of tragedy: who gives the stagnation of hope and fear—the deformity of vice without the temptation—the pain of sympathy without the interest—and who seems to rely, for the delight he is to convey to his reader, on the truth and accuracy with which he describes only what is disagreeable.

The best descriptive poetry is not, after all, to be found in our descriptive poets. There are set descriptions of the flowers, for instance, in Thomson, Cowper, and others; but none equal to those in Milton's Lycidas, and in the Winter's Tale.

We have few good pastorals in the language. Our manners

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are not Arcadian; our climate is not an eternal spring; our age is not the age of gold. We have no pastoral-writers equal to Theocritus, nor any landscapes like those of Claude Lorraine. The best parts of Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar are two fables, Mother Hubberd's Tale, and the Oak and the Briar; which last is as splendid a piece of oratory as any to be found in the records of the eloquence of the British senate! Browne, who came after Spenser, and Withers, have left some pleasing allegorical poems of this kind. Pope's are as full of senseless finery and trite affectation as if a peer of the realm were to sit for his picture with a crook and cocked hat on, smiling with an insipid air of no meaning, between nature and fashion. Sir Philip Sydney's Arcadia is a lasting monument of perverted power; where an image of extreme beauty, as that of "the shepherd boy piping as though he should never be old," peeps out once in a hundred folio pages, amidst heaps of intricate sophistry and scholastic quaintness. It is not at all like Nicholas Poussin's picture, in which he represents some shepherds wandering out in a morning of the spring, and coming to a tomb with this inscription—"I also was an Arcadian!" Perhaps the best pastoral in the language is that prose-poem, Walton's Complete Angler. That well-known work has a beauty and romantic interest equal to its simplicity, and arising out of it. In the description of a fishing-tackle you perceive the piety and humanity of the author's mind. It is to be doubted whether Sannazarius's Piscatory Eclogues are equal to the scenes described by Walton on the banks of the river Lea. He gives the feeling of the open air: we walk with him along the dusty road-side, or repose on the banks of the river under a shady tree: and in watching for the finny prey imbibe what he beautifully calls "the patience and simplicity of poor honest fishermen." We accompany them to their inn at night, and partake of their simple but delicious fare; while Maud, the pretty milk-maid, at her mother's desire, sings the classical ditties of the poet Marlow; "Come live with me, and be my love." Good cheer is not neglected in this work, any more than in Homer, or any other history that sets a proper value on the good things of this life. The prints in the Complete Angler give an additional reality and interest to the

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scenes it describes. While Tottenham Cross shall stand, and longer, thy work, amiable and happy old man, shall last!—It is in the notes to it that we find that character of "a fair and happy milk-maid," by Sir Thomas Overbury, which may vie in beauty and feeling with Chaucer's character of Griselda:

"A fair and happy milk-maid is a country wench that is so far from making herself beautiful by art that one look of her's is able to put all face-physic out of countenance. She knows a fair look is but a dumb orator to commend virtue, therefore minds it not. All her excellences stand in her so silently as if they had stolen upon her without her knowledge. The lining of her apparel (which is herself) is far better than outsides of tissue; for though she be not arrayed in the spoil of the silk-worm, she is decked in innocency, a far better wearing. She doth not, with lying long in bed, spoil both her complexion and conditions. Nature hath taught her too immoderate sleep is rust to the soul: she rises therefore with chanticleer, her dame's clock, and at night makes the lamb her curfew. Her breath is her own, which scents all the year long of June, like a new-made haycock. She makes her hand hard with labour, and her heart soft with pity; and when winter evenings fall early (sitting at her merry wheel) she sings a defiance to the giddy wheel of Fortune. She doth all things with so sweet a grace, it seems ignorance will not suffer her to do ill, being her mind is to do well. She bestows her year's wages at next fair; and, in choosing her garments, counts no bravery in the world like decency. The garden and the bee-hive are all her physic and chirurgery, and she lives the longer for't. She dares go alone, and unfold sheep in the night, and fears no manner of ill, because she means none: yet, to say the truth, she is never alone, for she is still accompanied with old songs, honest thoughts, and prayers, but short ones; yet they have their efficacy, in that they are not palled with ensuing idle cogitations. Lastly, her dreams are so chaste that she dare tell them; only a Friday's dream is all her superstition; that she conceals for fear of anger. Thus lives she; and all her care is she may die in the spring-time, to have store of flowers stuck upon her winding-sheet."

The love of the country has been sung by poets, and echoed by philosophers; but the first have not attempted, and the last have been greatly puzzled to account for it. I do not know that any one has ever explained, satisfactorily, the true source of this feeling, or of that soothing emotion which the sight of the country, or a lively description of rural objects hardly ever fails to infuse into the mind. Some have ascribed this feeling to the natural beauty of the objects themselves; others to the freedom from care, the silence and tranquillity which scenes of retire-

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ment afford; others to the healthy and innocent employments of a country life; others to the simplicity of country manners, and others to a variety of different causes; but none to the right one. All these, indeed, have their effect; but there is another principal one which has not been touched upon, or only slightly glanced at. I will not, however, imitate Mr. Horne Tooke, who after enumerating seventeen different definitions of the verb, and laughing at them all as deficient and nugatory, at the end of two quarto volumes does not tell us what the verb really is, and has left posterity to pluck out "the heart of his mystery." I will say at once what it is that distinguishes this interest from others, and that is its *abstractedness*. The interest we feel in human nature is exclusive, and confined to the individual; the interest we feel in external nature is common, and transferable from one object to all others of the same class. Thus:

Rousseau in his Confessions relates that, when he took possession of his room at Annecy, he found that he could see "a little spot of green" from his window, which endeared his situation the more to him because, he says, it was the first time he had had this object constantly before him since he left Boissy, the place where he was at school when a child.* Some such feeling as that here described will be found lurking at the bottom of all our attachments of this sort. Were it not for the recollections habitually associated with them, natural objects could not interest the mind in the manner they do. No doubt, the sky is beautiful, the clouds sail majestically along its bosom; the sun is cheering; there is something exquisitely graceful in the manner in which a plant or tree puts forth its branches; the motion with which they bend and tremble in the evening breeze is soft and lovely; there is music in the babbling of a brook; the view from the top of a mountain is full of grandeur; nor can we behold the ocean with indifference. Or, as the Minstrel sweetly sings,

> "Oh how canst thou renounce the boundless store
> Of charms which Nature to her votary yields!

* Pope also declares that he had a particular regard for an old post which stood in the court-yard before the house where he was brought up.

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The warbling woodland, the resounding shore,
The pomp of groves, and garniture of fields;
All that the genial ray of morning gilds,
And all that echoes to the song of even,
All that the mountain's sheltering bosom shields,
And all the dread magnificence of heaven,
Oh, how can'st thou renounce, and hope to be forgiven!"

It is not, however, the beautiful and magnificent alone tha we admire in Nature; the most insignificant and rudest objects are often found connected with the strongest emotions; we become attached to the most common and familiar images, as to the face of a friend whom we have long known, and from whom we have received many benefits. It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, with air and exercise, with our feelings in solitude, when the mind takes the strongest hold of things, and clings with the fondest interest to whatever strikes its attention; with change of place, the pursuit of new scenes, and thoughts of distant friends; it is because they have surrounded us in almost all situations, in joy and in sorrow, in pleasure and in pain; because they have been one chief source and nourishment of our feelings, and a part of our being, that we love them as we do ourselves.

There is, generally speaking, the same foundation for our love of Nature as for all our habitual attachments, namely, association of ideas. But this is not all. That which distinguishes this attachment from others is the transferable nature of our feelings with respect to physical objects; the associations connected with any one object extending to the whole class. Our having been attached to any particular person does not make us feel the same attachment to the next person we may chance to meet; but, if we have once associated strong feelings of delight with the objects of natural scenery, the tie becomes indissoluble, and we shall ever after feel the same attachment to other objects of the same sort. I remember, when I was abroad, the trees, and grass, and wet leaves, rustling in the walks of the Thuilleries, seemed to be as much English, to be as much the same trees and grass, that I had always been used to, as the

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sun shining over my head was the same sun which I saw in England; the faces only were foreign to me. Whence comes this difference? It arises from our always imperceptibly connecting the idea of the individual with man, and only the idea of the class with natural objects. In the one case, the external appearance or physical structure is the least thing to be attended to; in the other, it is everything. The springs that move the human form, and make it friendly or adverse to me, lie hid within it. There is an infinity of motives, passions, and ideas, contained in that narrow compass, of which I know nothing, and in which I have no share. Each individual is a world to himself, governed by a thousand contradictory and wayward impulses. I can, therefore, make no inference from one individual to another; nor can my habitual sentiments, with respect to any individual, extend beyond himself to others. A crowd of people presents a disjointed, confused and unsatisfactory appearance to the eye, because there is nothing to connect the motley assemblage into one continuous or general impression, unless when there is some common object of interest to fix their attention, as in the case of a full pit at the play-house. The same principle will also account for that feeling of littleness, vacuity, and perplexity, which a stranger feels on entering the streets of a populous city. Every individual he meets is a blow to his personal identity. Every new face is a teazing, unanswered riddle. He feels the same wearisome sensation in walking from Oxford Street to Temple Bar, as a person would do who should be compelled to read through the first leaf of all the volumes in a library. But it is otherwise with respect to nature. A flock of sheep is not a contemptible, but a beautiful, sight. The greatest number and variety of physical objects do not puzzle the will, or distract the attention, but are massed together under one uniform and harmonious feeling. The heart reposes in greater security on the immensity of Nature's works, "expatiates freely there," and finds elbow room and breathing space. We are always at home with Nature. There is neither hypocrisy, caprice, nor mental reservation in her favours. Our intercourse with her is not liable to accident or change, suspicion or disappointment: she smiles on us still the

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same. A rose is always sweet, a lily is always beautiful: we do not hate the one, nor envy the other. If we have once enjoyed the cool shade of a tree, and been lulled into a deep repose by the sound of a brook running at its foot, we are sure that wherever we can find a shady stream we can enjoy the same pleasure again; so that when we imagine these objects, we can easily form a mystic personification of the friendly power that inhabits them, Dryad or Naiad, offering its cool fountain or its tempting shade. Hence the origin of the Grecian mythology. All objects of the same kind being the same, not only in their appearance, but in their practical uses, we habitually confound them together under the same general idea; and whatever fondness we may have conceived for one is immediately placed to the common account. The most opposite kinds and remote trains of feeling gradually go to enrich the same sentiment; and in our love of nature, there is all the force of individual attachment, combined with the most airy abstraction. It is this circumstance which gives that refinement, expansion, and wild interest, to feelings of this sort, when strongly excited, which every one must have experienced who is a true lover of nature.

It is the same setting sun that we see and remember year after year, through summer and winter, seed-time and harvest. The moon that shines above our heads, or plays through the chequered shade, is the same moon that we used to read of in Mrs. Radcliffe's romances. We see no difference in the trees first covered with leaves in the spring. The dry reeds rustling on the side of a stream—the woods swept by the loud blast—the dark massy foliage of autumn—the gray trunks and naked branches of the trees in winter—the sequestered copse, and wide-extended heath—the glittering sunny showers, and December snows—are still the same, or accompanied with the same thoughts and feelings: there is no object, however trifling or rude, that does not in some mood or other find its way into the heart, as a link in the chain of our living being; and this it is that makes good that saying of the poet—

> "To me the meanest flower that blows can give
> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

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Thus nature is a kind of universal home, and every object it presents to us an old acquaintance with unaltered looks; for there is that consent and mutual harmony among all her works, one undivided spirit pervading them throughout, that, to him who has well acquainted himself with them, they speak always the same well-known language, striking on the heart, amidst unquiet thoughts and the tumult of the world, like the music of one's native tongue heard in some far-off country.

> "My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky:
> So was it when my life began,
> So is it now I am a man,
> So shall it be when I grow old and die.
> The child 's the father of the man,
> And I would have my years to be
> Linked each to each by natural piety."

The daisy that first strikes the child's eye, in trying to leap over his own shadow, is the same flower that with timid upward glance implores the grown man not to tread upon it. Rousseau, in one of his botanical excursions, meeting with the periwinkle, fell upon his knees, crying out—*Ah! voila de la pervenche!* It was because he had, thirty years before, brought home the same flower with him in one of his rambles with Madame de Warens, near Chambery. It struck him as the same identical little blue flower that he remembered so well; and thirty years of sorrow and bitter regret were effaced from his memory. That, or a thousand other flowers of the same name, were the same to him, to the heart, and to the eye; but there was but one Madame Warens in the world, whose image was never absent from his thoughts; with whom flowers and verdure sprung up beneath his feet, and without whom all was cold and barren in nature and in his own breast. The cuckoo, "that wandering voice," that comes and goes with the spring, mocks our ears with one note from youth to age; and the lapwing, screaming round the traveller's path, repeats forever the same sad story of Tereus and Philomel!

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LECTURE VI.

ON SWIFT, YOUNG, GRAY, COLLINS, ETC.

I SHALL in the present Lecture go back to the age of Queen Anne, and endeavour to give a cursory account of the most eminent of our poets, of whom I have not already spoken, from that period to the present.

The three principal poets among the wits of Queen Anne's reign, next to Pope, were Prior, Swift, and Gay. Parnell, though a good-natured, easy man, and a friend to poets and the Muses, was himself little more than an occasional versifier; and Arbuthnot, who had as much wit as the best of them, chose to show it in prose, and not in verse. He had a very notable share in the immortal History of John Bull, and the inimitable and the praiseworthy Memoirs of Martinus Scriblerus.—There has been a great deal said and written about the plagiarisms of Sterne; but the only real plagiarism he had been guilty of (if such theft were a crime,) is in taking Tristram Shandy's father from Martin's, the elder Scriblerus. The original idea of the character, that is, of the opinionated, captious old gentleman, who is pedantic, not from profession, but choice, belongs to Arbuthnot. Arbuthnot's style is distinguished from that of his contemporaries, even by a greater degree of terseness and conciseness. He leaves out every superfluous word; is sparing of connecting particles, and introductory phrases; uses always the simplest forms of construction; and is more a master of the idiomatic peculiarities and internal resources of the language than almost any other writer. There is a research in the choice of a plain, as well as of an ornamented or learned, style; and, in fact, a great deal more. Among common English words, there may be ten expressing the same thing with different degrees of force and propriety, and only one of them the very word we want, because it is the only

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one that answers exactly with the idea we have in our minds. Each word in familiar use has a set of associations and shades of meaning attached to it, and distinguished from each other by inveterate custom; and it is in having the whole of these at our command, and in knowing which to choose, as they are called for by the occasion, that the perfection of a pure conversational prose-style consists. But in writing a florid and artificial style, neither the same range of invention, nor the same quick sense of propriety—nothing but learning is required. If you know the words, and their general meaning, it is sufficient: it is impossible you should know the nicer inflections of signification, depending on an endless variety of application, in expressions borrowed from a foreign or dead language. They all impose upon the ear alike, because they are not familiar to it; the only distinction left is between the pompous and the plain; the *sesquipedalia verba* have this advantage, that they are all of one length; and any words are equally fit for a learned style, so that we have never heard them before. Themistocles thought that the same sounding epithets could not suit all subjects, as the same dress does not fit all persons. The style of our modern prose-writers is very fine in itself; but it wants variety of inflection and adaptation; it hinders us from seeing the differences of the things it undertakes to describe.

What I have here insisted on will be found to be the leading distinction between the style of Swift, Arbuthnot, Steele, and the other writers of the age of Queen Anne, and the style of Dr. Johnson, which succeeded to it. The one is English, and the other is not. The writers first mentioned, in order to express their thoughts, looked about them for the properest word to convey any idea, that the language which they spoke, and which their countrymen understood, afforded: Dr. Johnson takes the first English word that offers, and, by translating it at a venture into the first Greek or Latin word he can think of, only retaining the English termination, produces an extraordinary effect upon the reader, by much the same sort of mechanical process that Trim converted the old jack-boots into a pair of new mortars.

Dr. Johnson was a lazy learned man, who liked to think and talk better than to read or write; who, however, wrote much

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and well, but too often by rote. His long compound Latin phrases required less thought, and took up more room than others. What shows the facilities afforded by this style of imposing generalization is that it was instantly adopted with success by all those who were writers by profession, or who were not; and that, at present, we cannot see a lottery puff or a quack advertisement pasted against a wall, that is not perfectly Johnsonian in style. Formerly, the learned had the privilege of translating their notions into Latin; and a great privilege it was, as it confined the reputation and emoluments of learning to themselves. Dr. Johnson may be said to have naturalised this privilege, by inventing a sort of jargon translated half-way out of one language into the other, which raised the Doctor's reputation, and confounded all ranks in literature.

In the short period above alluded to, authors professed to write as other men spoke; everybody now affects to speak as authors write; and any one who retains the use of his mother tongue, either in writing or conversation, is looked upon as a very illiterate character.

Prior and Gay belong, in the characteristic excellences of their style, to the same class of writers with Suckling, Rochester, and Sedley: the former imbibed most of the licentious levity of the age of Charles II. and carried it on beyond the Revolution under King William. Prior has left no single work equal to Gay's Fables, or the Beggar's Opera. But in his lyrical and fugitive pieces he has shown even more genius, more playfulness, more mischievous gaiety. No one has exceeded him in the laughing grace with which he glances at a subject that will not bear examining, with which he gently hints at what cannot be directly insisted on, with which he half conceals, and half draws aside, the veil from some of the Muses' nicest mysteries. His Muse is, in fact, a giddy wanton flirt, who spends her time in playing at snap-dragon and blind-man's buff, who tells what she should not, and knows more than she tells. She laughs at the tricks she shows us, and blushes, or would be thought to do so, at what she keeps concealed. Prior has translated several of Fontaine's Tales from the French; and they have lost nothing in the translation, either of their wit or malice. I need not name

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them: but the one I like the most is that of Cupid in search of Venus's doves. No one could insinuate a knavish plot, a tender point, a loose moral, with such unconscious archness, and careless raillery, as if he gained new self-possession and adroitness from the perplexity and confusion into which he throws scrupulous imaginations, and knew how to seize on all the ticklish parts of his subject, from their involuntarily shrinking under his grasp. Some of his imitations of Boileau's servile addresses to Louis XIV. which he has applied with a happy mixture of wit and patriotic enthusiasm to King William, or as he familiarly calls him, to

> "Little Will, the scourge of France,
> No Godhead, but the first of men,"

are excellent, and show the same talent for *double-entendre* and the same gallantry of spirit, whether in the softer lyric, or the more lively heroic. Some of Prior's *bon mots* are the best that are recorded. His serious poetry, as his *Solomon*, is as heavy as his familiar style was light and agreeable. His moral Muse is a Magdalen, and should not have obtruded herself on public view. Henry and Emma is a paraphrase of the old ballad of the Nutbrown Maid, and not so good as the original. In short, as we often see in other cases, where men thwart their own genius, Prior's sentimental and romantic productions are mere affectation, the result not of powerful impulse or real feeling, but of a consciousness of his deficiencies, and a wish to supply their place by labour and art.

Gay was sometimes grosser than Prior, not systematically, but inadvertently—from not being so well aware of what he was about; nor was there the same necessity for caution, for his grossness is by no means so seductive or inviting.

Gay's Fables are certainly a work of great merit, both as to the quantity of invention implied, and as to the elegance and facility of the execution. They are, however, spun out too long; the descriptions and narrative are too diffuse and desultory; and the moral is sometimes without point. They are more like Tales than fables. The best are, perhaps, the Hare with Many Friends, the Monkeys, and the Fox at the Point of Death. His Pastorals are pleasing and poetical. But his capital work is

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his Beggar's Opera. It is indeed a masterpiece of wit and genius, not to say of morality. In composing it, he chose a very unpromising ground to work upon, and he has prided himself in adorning it with all the graces, the precision, and brilliancy of style. It is a vulgar error to call this a vulgar play. So far from it that I do not scruple to say that it appears to me one of the most refined productions in the language. The elegance of the composition is in exact proportion to the coarseness of the materials: by "happy alchemy of mind," the author has extracted an essence of refinement from the dregs of human life, and turns its very dross into gold. The scenes, characters, and incidents are, in themselves, of the lowest and most disgusting kind: but, by the sentiments and reflections which are put into the mouths of highwaymen, turnkeys, their mistresses, wives, or daughters, he has converted this motley group into a set of fine gentlemen and ladies, satirists and philosophers. He has also effected this transformation without once violating probability, or "o'erstepping the modesty of nature." In fact, Gay has turned the tables on the critics; and by the assumed license of the mock-heroic style, has enabled himself to *do justice to nature*, that is, to give all the force, truth, and locality of real feeling to the thoughts and expressions, without being called to the bar of false taste and affected delicacy. The extreme beauty and feeling of the song, "Woman is like the fair flower in its lustre," are only equalled by its characteristic propriety and *naïveté*. *Polly* describes her lover going to the gallows with the same touching simplicity, and with all the natural fondness of a young girl in her circumstances, who sees, in his approaching catastrophe, nothing but the misfortunes and the personal accomplishments of the object of her affections. "I see him sweeter than the nosegay in his hand; the admiring crowd lament that so lovely a youth should come to an untimely end: even butchers weep, and Jack Ketch refuses his fee rather than consent to tie the fatal knot." The preservation of the character and costume is complete. It has been said by a great authority—"There is some soul of goodness in things evil:" and the *Beggar's Opera* is a good-natured but instructive comment on this text. The poet has thrown all the gaiety and sunshine

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of the imagination, all the intoxication of pleasure, and the vanity of despair, round the short-lived existence of his heroes; while *Pecchum* and *Lockitt* are seen in the back-ground, parcelling out their months and weeks between them. The general view exhibited of human life is of the most subtle and abstracted kind. The author has, with great felicity, brought out the good qualities and interesting emotions almost inseparable from the lowest conditions; and, with the same penetrating glance, has detected the disguises which rank and circumstances lend to exalted vice. Every line in this sterling comedy sparkles with wit, and is fraught with the keenest sarcasm. The very wit, however, takes off from the offensiveness of the satire; and I have seen great statesmen, very great statesmen, heartily enjoying the joke, laughing most immoderately at the compliments paid to them, as not much worse than pickpockets and cut-throats in a different line of life, and pleased, as it were, to see themselves humanised by some sort of fellowship with their kind. Indeed, it may be said that the moral of the piece is *to show the vulgarity of vice;* or that the same violations of integrity and decorum, the same habitual sophistry in palliating their want of principle, are common to the great and powerful, with the meanest and most contemptible of the species. What can be more convincing than the arguments used by these would-be politicians, to show that, in hypocrisy, selfishness and treachery, they do not come up to many of their betters? The exclamation of *Mrs. Peachum*, when her daughter marries *Macheath*, "Hussy, hussy, you will be as ill used, and as much neglected, as if you had married a lord," is worth all Miss Hannah More's laboured invectives on the laxity of the manners of high life!

I shall conclude this account of Gay with his verses on Sir Richard Blackmore, which may serve at once as a specimen of his own manner, and as a character of a voluminous contemporary poet, who was admired by Mr. Locke and knighted by King William III.

"See who ne'er was nor will be half-read,
Who first sung Arthur, then sung Alfred;
Praised great Eliza in God's anger,
Till all true Englishmen cried, 'Hang her!'—

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Maul'd human wit in one thick satire;
Next in three books spoil'd human nature:
Undid creation at a jerk,
And of Redemption made damn'd work.
Then took his Muse at once, and dipt her
Full in the middle of the Scripture.
What wonders there the man, grown old, did!
Sternhold himself he out-Sternholded.
Made David seem so mad and freakish,
All thought him just what thought King Achish.
No mortal read his Solomon
But julged Re'boam his own son.
Moses he serv'd as Moses Pharaoh,
And Deborah as she Siserah;
Made Jeremy full sore to cry,
And Job himself curse God and die.
What punishment all this must follow?
Shall Arthur use him like King Tollo?
Shall David as Uriah slay him?
Or dexterous Deborah Siserah him?
No!—none of these! Heaven spare his life!
But send him, honest Job, thy wife!"

Gay's Trivia, or Art of Walking the Streets, is as pleasant as walking the streets must have been at the time when it was written. His ballad of Black Eyed Susan is one of the most delightful that can be imagined; nor do I see that it is a bit the worse for Mr. Jekyll's parody on it.

Swift's reputation as a poet has been in a manner obscured by the greater splendour, by the natural force and inventive genius of his prose writings; but if he had never written either the Tale of a Tub or Gulliver's Travels, his name merely as a poet would have come down to us, and have gone down to posterity, with well-earned honours. His imitations of Horace, and still more his Verses on his own Death, place him in the first rank of agreeable moralists in verse. There is not only a dry humour, an exquisite tone of irony, in these productions of his pen, but there is a touching, unpretending pathos, mixed up with the most whimsical and eccentric strokes of pleasantry and satire. His Description of the Morning in London, and of a City Shower, which were first published in the Tatler, are among the most delightful of the contents of that very de-

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lightful work. Swift shone as one of the most sensible of the poets; he is also distinguished as one of the most nonsensical of them. No man has written so many lack-a-daisical, slip-shod, tedious, trifling, foolish, fantastical verses as he, which are so little an imputation on the wisdom of the writer; and which, in fact, only show his readiness to oblige others, and to forget himself. He has gone so far as to invent a new stanza of fourteen and sixteen syllable lines for Mary the cookmaid to vent her budget of nothings, and for Mrs. Harris to gossip with the deaf old housekeeper. Oh, when shall we have such another Rector of Laracor!—The Tale of a Tub is one of the most masterly compositions in the language, whether for thought, wit, or style. It is so capital and undeniable a proof of the author's talents, that Dr. Johnson, who did not like Swift, would not allow that he wrote it. It is hard that the same performance should stand in the way of a man's promotion to a bishopric, as wanting gravity, and at the same time be denied to be his, as having too much wit. It is a pity the Doctor did not find out some graver author, for whom he felt a critical kindness, on whom to father this splendid, but unacknowledged, production.—Dr. Johnson could not deny that Gulliver's Travels were his; he therefore disputed their merits, and said that, after the first idea of them was conceived, they were easy to execute; all the rest followed mechanically. I do not know how that may be; but the mechanism employed is something very different from any that the author of Rasselas was in the habit of bringing to bear on such occasions. There is nothing more futile, as well as invidious, than this mode of criticising a work of original genius. Its greatest merit is supposed to be in the invention; and you say, very wisely, that it is not *in the execution*. You might as well take away the merit of the invention of the telescope, by saying that, after its uses were explained and understood, any ordinary eyesight could look through it. Whether the excellence of Gulliver's Travels is in the conception or the execution, is of little consequence; the power is somewhere, and it is a power that has moved the world. The power is not that of big words and vaunting common places. Swift left these to those who wanted them;

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and has done what his acuteness and intensity of mind alone could enable any one to conceive or to perform. His object was to strip empty pride and grandeur of the imposing air which external circumstances throw around them; and for this purpose he has cheated the imagination of the illusions which the prejudices of sense and of the world put upon it, by reducing every thing to the abstract predicament of size. He enlarges or diminishes the scale, as he wishes, to show the insignificance or the grossness of our over-weening self-love. That he has done this with mathematical precision, with complete presence of mind and perfect keeping, in a manner that comes equally home to the understanding of the man and of the child, does not take away from the merit of the work or the genius of the author. He has taken a new view of human nature, such as a being of a higher sphere might take of it; he has torn the scales from off his moral vision; he has tried an experiment upon human life, and sifted its pretensions from the alloy of circumstances; he has measured it with a rule, has weighed it in a balance, and found it, for the most part, wanting and worthless, in substance and in show. Nothing solid, nothing valuable is left in his system but virtue and wisdom. What a libel is this upon mankind! What a convincing proof of misanthropy! What presumption and what *malice prepense*, to show men what they are, and to teach them what they ought to be! What a mortifying stroke, aimed at national glory, is that unlucky incident of Gulliver's wading across the channel and carrying off the whole fleet of Blefuscu! After that, we have only to consider which of the contending parties was in the right. What a shock to personal vanity is given in the account of Gulliver's nurse Glumdalclitch! Still, notwithstanding the disparagement to her personal charms, her good nature remains the same amiable quality as before. I cannot see the harm, the misanthropy, the immoral and degrading tendency of this. The moral lesson is as fine as the intellectual exhibition is amusing. It is an attempt to tear off the mask of imposture from the world; and nothing but imposture has a right to complain of it. It is, indeed, the way with our quacks in morality to preach up the dignity of human nature, to pamper pride and

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hypocrisy with the idle mockeries of the virtues they pretend to, and which they have not: but it was not Swift's way to cant morality, or any thing else; nor did his genius prompt him to write unmeaning panegyrics on mankind!

I do not, therefore, agree with the estimate of Swift's moral or intellectual character, given by an eminent critic, who does not seem to have forgotten the party politics of Swift. I do not carry my political resentments so far back: I can at this time of day forgive Swift for having been a Tory. I feel little disturbance (whatever I might think of them) at his political sentiments, which died with him, considering how much else he has left behind him of a more solid and imperishable nature! If he had, indeed, (like some others) merely left behind him the lasting infamy of a destroyer of his country, or the shining example of an apostate from liberty, I might have thought the case altered.

The determination with which Swift persisted in a preconcerted theory, savoured of the morbid affection of which he died. There is nothing more likely to drive a man mad than the being unable to get rid of the idea of the distinction between right and wrong, and an obstinate, constitutional preference of the true to the agreeable. Swift was not a Frenchman. In this respect he differed from Rabelais and Voltaire. They have been accounted the three greatest wits in modern times; but their wit was of a peculiar kind in each. They are little beholden to each other; there is some resemblance between Lord Peter in the Tale of a Tub, and Rabelais' Friar John; but in general they are all three authors of a substantive character in themselves. Swift's wit (particularly in his chief prose works) was serious, saturnine, and practical; Rabelais' was fantastical and joyous; Voltaire's was light, sportive, and verbal. Swift's wit was the wit of sense; Rabelais', the wit of nonsense; Voltaire's, of indifference to both. The ludicrous in Swift arises out of his keen sense of impropriety, his soreness and impatience of the least absurdity. He separates, with a severe and caustic air, truth from falsehood, folly from wisdom, "shews vice her own image, scorn her own feature;" and it is the force, the precision, and the honest abruptness with which the separation is made, that excites our surprise, our admiration, and laughter. He sets a mark of re

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probation on that which offends good sense and good manners, which cannot be mistaken, and which holds it up to our ridicule and contempt ever after. His occasional disposition to trifling (already noticed) was a relaxation from the excessive earnestness of his mind. *Indignatio facit versus.* His better genius was his spleen. It was the biting acrimony of his temper that sharpened his other faculties. The truth of his perceptions produced the pointed coruscations of his wit; his playful irony was the result of inward bitterness of thought; his imagination was the product of the literal, dry, incorrigible tenaciousness of his understanding. He endeavoured to escape from the persecution of realities into the regions of fancy, and invented his Lilliputians and Brobdignagians, Yahoos, and Houynhyms, as a diversion to the more painful knowledge of the world around him: *they* only made him laugh, while men and women made him angry. His feverish impatience made him view the infirmities of that great baby the world with the same scrutinizing glance and jealous irritability that a parent regards the failings of its offspring; but, as Rousseau has well observed, parents have not on this account been supposed to have more affection for other people's children than their own. In other respects, and except from the sparkling effervescence of his gall, Swift's brain was as "dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage." He hated absurdity—Rabelais loved it, exaggerated it with supreme satisfaction, luxuriated in its endless varieties, rioted in nonsense, "reigned there and revelled." He dwelt on the absurd and ludicrous for the pleasure they gave him, not for the pain. He lived upon laughter, and died laughing. He indulged his vein, and took his full swing of folly. He did not baulk his fancy or his readers. His wit was to him "as riches fineless;" he saw no end of his wealth in that way, and set no limits to his extravagance: he was communicative, prodigal, boundless, and inexhaustible. His were the Saturnalia of wit, the riches and the royalty, the health and long life. He is intoxicated with gaiety, mad with folly. His animal spirits drown him in a flood of mirth: his blood courses up and down his veins like wine. His thirst of enjoyment is as great as his thirst of drink: his appetite for good things of all sorts is unsatisfied, and there is a never-

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ending supply. *Discourse is dry;* so they moisten their words in their cups, and relish their dry jests with plenty of Botargos and dried neats' tongues. It is like Camacho's wedding in Don Quixote, where Sancho ladled out whole pullets and fat geese from the soup-kettles at a pull. The flagons are set a running, their tongues wag at the same time, and their mirth flows as a river. How Friar John roars and lays about him in the vineyard! How Panurge whines in the storm, and how dexterously he contrives to throw the sheep overboard! How much Pantagruel behaves like a wise king! How Gargantua mewls, and pules, and slabbers his nurse, and demeans himself most like a royal infant! what provinces he devours! what seas he drinks up! How he eats, drinks, and sleeps—sleeps, eats, and drinks! The style of Rabelais is no less prodigious than his matter. His words are of marrow, unctuous, dropping fatness. He was a mad wag, the king of good fellows, and prince of practical philosophers!

Rabelais was a Frenchman of the old school—Voltaire of the new. The wit of the one arose from an exuberance of enjoyment—of the other, from an excess of indifference, real or assumed. Voltaire had no enthusiasm for one thing or another: he made light of everything. In his hands all things turn to chaff and dross, as the pieces of silver money in the Arabian Nights were changed by the hands of the enchanter into little dry crumbling leaves! He is a Parisian. He never exaggerates, is never violent: he treats things with the most provoking *sang froid;* and expresses his contempt by the most indirect hints, and in the fewest words, as if he hardly thought them worth even his contempt. He retains complete possession of himself and of his subject. He does not effect his purpose by the eagerness of his blows, but by the delicacy of his tact. The poisoned wound he inflicted was so fine as scarcely to be felt till it rankled and festered in its "mortal consequences." His callousness was an excellent foil for the antagonists he had mostly to deal with. He took knaves and fools on his shield well. He stole away its cloak from grave imposture. If he reduced other things below their true value, making them seem worthless and hollow, he did not degrade the pretensions of tyranny and super-

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stition below their true value, by making them seem utterly worthless and hollow, as contemptible as they were odious. This was the service he rendered to truth and mankind! His *Candide* is a masterpiece of wit. It has been called "the dull product of a scoffer's pen." It is, indeed, "the product of a scoffer's pen;" but after reading the Excursion, few people will think it *dull*. It is in the most perfect keeping, and without any appearance of effort. Every sentence tells, and the whole reads like one sentence. There is something sublime in Martin's sceptical indifference to moral good and evil. It is the repose of the grave. It is better to suffer this living death than a living martyrdom. "Nothing can touch him further." The moral of Candide (such as it is) is the same as that of Rasselas: the execution is different. Voltaire says, "A great book is a great evil." Dr. Johnson would have laboured this short apophthegm into a voluminous commonplace. Voltaire's traveller (in another work) being asked "whether he likes black or white mutton best," replies that "he is indifferent, provided it is tender." Dr. Johnson did not get at a conclusion by so short a way as this. If Voltaire's licentiousness is objected to me, I say, let it be placed to its true account, the manners of the age and court in which he lived. The lords and ladies of the bedchamber in the reign of Louis XV. found no fault with the immoral tendency of his writings. Why then should our modern *purists* quarrel with them?—But to return.

Young is a gloomy epigrammatist. He has abused great powers both of thought and language. His moral reflections are sometimes excellent; but he spoils their beauty by overloading them with a religious horror, and at the same time giving them all the smart turns and quaint expressions of an enigma or repartee in verse. The well-known lines on Procrastination are in his best manner:

> "Be wise to-day; 'tis madness to defer;
> Next day the fatal precedent will plead;
> Thus on, till wisdom is push'd out of life.
> Procrastination is the thief of time;
> Year after year it steals, till all are fled,
> And to the mercies of a moment leaves
> The vast concerns of an eternal scene.

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"Of man's miraculous mistakes, this bears
The palm, 'That all men are about to live,'
For ever on the brink of being born.
All pay themselves the compliment to think
They, one day, shall not drivel; and their pride
On this reversion takes up ready praise;
At least, their own; their future selves applauds;
How excellent that life they ne'er will lead!
Time lodg'd in their own hands is Folly's vails:
That lodg'd in Fate's, to Wisdom they consign;
The thing they can't but purpose they postpone.
'Tis not in Folly not to scorn a fool;
And scarce in human Wisdom to do more.
All promise is poor dilatory man,
And that through every stage. When young, indeed,
In full content, we, sometimes, nobly rest,
Un-anxious for ourselves; and only wish,
As duteous sons, our fathers were more wise.
At thirty man suspects himself a fool;
Knows it at forty, and reforms his plan;
At fifty chides his infamous delay,
Pushes his prudent purpose to resolve;
In all the magnanimity of thought
Resolves, and re-resolves; then dies the same.

"And why? Because he thinks himself immortal,
All men think all men mortal, but themselves;
Themselves, when some alarming shock of fate
Strikes through their wounded hearts the sudden dread;
But their hearts wounded, like the wounded air,
Soon close; where, past the shaft, no trace is found.
As from the wing no scar the sky retains;
The parted wave no furrow from the keel;
So dies in human hearts the thought of death.
Ev'n with the tender tear which nature sheds
O'er those we love, we drop it in their grave."

His Universal Passion is a keen and powerful satire; but the effort takes from the effect, and oppresses attention by perpetual and violent demands upon it. His tragedy of the Revenge is monkish and scholastic. Zanga is a vulgar caricature of Iago. The finest lines in it are the burst of triumph at the end, when his revenge is completed:

"Let Europe and her pallid sons go weep,
Let Afric on her hundred thrones rejoice," &c.

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Collins is a writer of a very different stamp, who had perhaps less general power of mind than Young; but he had that true *vivida vis*, that genuine inspiration, which alone can give birth to the highest efforts of poetry. He leaves stings in the minds of his readers, certain traces of thought and feeling, which never wear out, because nature had left them in his own mind. He is the only one of the minor poets of whom, if he had lived, it cannot be said that he might not have done the greatest things. The germ is there. He is sometimes affected, unmeaning and obscure; but he also catches rich glimpses of the bowers of Paradise, and has lofty aspirations after the highest seats of the Muses. With a great deal of tinsel and splendid patch-work, he has not been able to hide the solid sterling ore of genius. In his best works there is an attic simplicity, a pathos, and fervour of imagination, which make us the more lament that the efforts of his mind were at first depressed by neglect and pecuniary embarrassment, and at length buried in the gloom of an unconquerable and fatal malady. How many poets have gone through all the horrors of poverty and contempt, and ended their days in moping melancholy or moody madness!

> "We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
> But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness."

Is this the fault of themselves, of nature in tempering them of too fine a clay, or of the world, that spurner of living, and patron of dead merit? Read the account of Collins—with hopes frustrated, with faculties blighted, at last when it was too late for himself or others, receiving the deceitful favours of relenting Fortune, which served only to throw their sunshine on his decay, and to light him to an early grave. He was found sitting with every spark of imagination extinguished, and with only the faint traces of memory and reason left—with only one book in his room, the Bible; "but that," he said, "was the best." A melancholy damp hung like an unwholesome mildew upon his faculties—a canker had consumed the flower of his life. He produced works of genius, and the public regarded them with scorn: he aimed at excellence that should be his own, and his friends treated his efforts as the wanderings of

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fatuity. The proofs of his capacity are, his Ode on Evening, his Ode on the Passions (particularly the fine personification of Hope,) his Ode to Fear, the Dirge in Cymbeline, the Lines on Thomson's Grave, and his Eclogues, parts of which are admirable. But perhaps his Ode on the Poetical Character is the best of all. A rich distilled perfume emanates from it like the breath of genius; a golden cloud envelopes it; a honeyed paste of poetic diction encrusts it, like the candied coat of the auricula. His Ode to Evening shows equal genius in the images and versification. The sounds steal slowly over the ear, like the gradual coming on of evening itself:

"If aught of oaten stop or pastoral song
May hope, chaste Eve, to soothe thy modest ear,
Like thy own solemn springs,
Thy springs and dying gales,

O nymph reserv'd, while now the bright-haired sun
Sits on yon western tent, whose cloudy skirts
With brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy bed:

Now air is hush'd, save where the weak-ey'd bat,
With short shrill shriek, flits by on leathern wing,
Or where the beetle winds
His small but sullen horn,

As oft he rises midst the twilight path,
Against the pilgrim borne in heedless hum.
Now teach me, maid compos'd,
To breathe some soften'd strain,

Whose numbers, stealing through thy darkling vale,
May not unseemly with its stillness suit,
As, musing slow, I hail
Thy genial, lov'd return!

For when thy folding star arising shows
His paly circlet, at his warning lamp
The fragrant Hours and Elves
Who slept in flow'rs the day,

And many a nymph who wreathes her brows with sedge
And sheds the fresh'ning dew, and, lovelier still,
The pensive Pleasures sweet
Prepare thy shadowy car;

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Then lead, calm Votress, where some sheety lake
Cheers the lone heath, or some time-hallow'd pile,
Or upland fallows gray
Reflect its last cool gleam.

But when chill blust'ring winds, or driving rain,
Forbid my willing feet, be mine the hut,
That from the mountain's side
Views wilds and swelling floods,

And hamlets brown, and dim discover'd spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.

While Spring shall pour his show'rs, as oft he wont,
And bathe thy breathing tresses, meekest Eve!
While Summer loves to sport
Beneath thy lingering light;

While sallow Autumn fills thy lap with leaves;
Or winter yelling through the troublous air,
Affrights thy shrinking train,
And rudely rends thy robes;

So long, sure-found beneath the sylvan shed,
Shall Fancy, Friendship, Science, rose-lipp'd Health,
Thy gentlest influence own,
And hymn thy favourite name."

Hammond, whose poems are bound up with Collins's, in Bell's pocket edition, was a young gentleman, who appears to have fallen in love about the year 1740, and who translated Tibullus into English verse, to let his mistress and the public know of it.

I should conceive that Collins had a much greater poetical genius than Gray: he had more of that fine madness which is inseparable from it, of its turbid effervescence, of all that pushes it to the verge of agony or rapture. Gray's Pindaric Odes are, I believe, generally given up at present: they are stately and pedantic, a kind of methodical borrowed phrensy. But I cannot so easily give up, nor will the world be in any haste to part with, his Elegy in a Country Church-yard: it is one of the most classical productions that ever was penned by a refined and thoughtful mind, moralising on human life. Mr. Coleridge (in his Literary Life) says that his friend Mr. Wordsworth had

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undertaken to show that the language of the Elegy is unintelligible: it has, however, been understood! The Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College is more mechanical and commonplace; but it touches on certain strings about the heart, that vibrate in unison with it to our latest breath. No one ever passes by Windsor's "stately heights," or sees the distant spires of Eton College below, without thinking of Gray. He deserves that we should think of him; for he thought of others, and turned a trembling, ever-watchful ear to "the still sad music of humanity."—His letters are inimitably fine. If his poems are sometimes finical and pedantic, his prose is quite free from affectation. He pours his thoughts out upon paper as they arise in his mind; and they arise in his mind without pretence, or constraint, from the pure impulse of learned leisure and contemplative indolence. He is not here on stilts or in buckram; but smiles in his easy chair, as he moralises through the loopholes of retreat, on the bustle and raree-show of the world, or on "those reverend bedlams, colleges, and schools!"—He had nothing to do but to read and to think, and to tell his friends what he read and thought. His life was a luxurious thoughtful dream. "Be mine," he says in one of his Letters, "to read eternal new romances of Marivaux and Crebillon." And in another, to show his contempt for action and the turmoils of ambition, he says to some one, "Don't you remember Lords —— and ——, who are now great statesmen, little dirty boys playing at cricket? For my part, I do not feel a bit wiser, or bigger, or older than I did then." What an equivalent for not being wise or great, to be always young! What a happiness never to lose or gain anything in the game of human life, by being never anything more than a looker-on!

How different from Shenstone, who only wanted to be looked at: who withdrew from the world to be followed by the crowd, and courted popularity by affecting privacy! His Letters show him to have lived in a continual fever of petty vanity, and to have been a finished literary coquet. He seems always to say, "You will find nothing in the world so amiable as Nature and me: come, and admire us." His poems are indifferent and tasteless, except his Pastoral Ballad, his Lines on Jemmy Daw-

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son, and his School-mistress, which last is a perfect piece of writing.

Akenside had in him the materials of poetry, but he was hardly a great poet. He improved his Pleasures of the Imagination in the subsequent editions, by pruning away a great many redundances of style and ornament. Armstrong is better, though he has not chosen a very exhilarating subject—The Art of Preserving Health. Churchill's Satires on the Scotch, and Characters of the Players, are as good as the subject deserved: they are strong, coarse, and full of an air of hardened assurance. I ought not to pass over without mention Green's Poem on the Spleen, or Dyer's Grongar Hill.

The principal name of the period we are now come to is that of Goldsmith, than which few names stand higher or fairer in the annals of modern literature. One should have his own pen to describe him as he ought to be described—amiable, various, and bland, with careless inimitable grace touching on every kind of excellence—with manners unstudied, but a gentle heart—performing miracles of skill from pure happiness of nature, and whose greatest fault was ignorance of his own worth. As a poet, he is the most flowing and elegant of our versifiers since Pope, with traits of artless nature which Pope had not, and with a peculiar felicity in his turns upon words, which he constantly repeated with delightful effect: such as—

> "——— His lot, though small,
> He sees that little lot, the lot of all."
> * * * * * *
> "And turn'd and look'd, and turn'd to look again."

As a novelist, his Vicar of Wakefield has charmed all Europe. What reader is there in the civilised world who is not the better for the story of the washes which the worthy Dr. Primrose demolished so deliberately with the poker—for the knowledge of the guinea which the Miss Primroses kept unchanged in their pockets—the adventure of the picture of the Vicar's family, which could not be got into the house—and that of the Flamborough family, all painted with oranges in their hands—or for the story of the case of shagreen spectacles and the cosmogony?

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As a comic writer, his Tony Lumpkin draws forth new powers from Mr. Liston's face. That alone is praise enough for it. Poor Goldsmith! how happy he has made others! how unhappy he was in himself! He never had the pleasure of reading his own works! He had only the satisfaction of good-naturedly relieving the necessities of others, and the consolation of being harassed to death with his own! He is the most amusing and interesting person, in one of the most amusing and interesting books in the world, Boswell's Life of Johnson. His peach-coloured coat shall always bloom in Boswell's writings, and his fame survive in his own!—His genius was a mixture of originality and imitation: he could do nothing without some model before him, and he could copy nothing that he did not adorn with the graces of his own mind.—Almost all the latter part of the Vicar of Wakefield, and a great deal of the former, is taken from Joseph Andrews; but the circumstances I have mentioned above are not.

The finest things he has left behind him in verse are his character of a country school-master, and that prophetic description of Burke in the Retaliation. His moral Essays, in the Citizen of the World, are as agreeable chit-chat as can be conveyed in the form of didactic discourses.

Warton was a poet and a scholar, studious with ease, learned without affectation. He had a happiness which some have been prouder of than he, who deserved it less—he was a poet-laureat,

> "And that green wreath which decks the bard when dead,
> That laurel garland, crown'd his living head."

But he bore his honours meekly, and performed his half-yearly task regularly. I should not have mentioned him for this distinction alone (the highest which a poet can receive from the state,) but for another circumstance; I mean his being the author of some of the finest sonnets in the language—at least so they appear to me; and as this species of composition has the necessary advantage of being short (though it is sometimes both "tedious and brief,") I will here repeat two or three of them, as treating pleasing subjects in a pleasing and philosophical way.

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Written in a blank leaf of Dugdale's Monasticon.

"Deem not, devoid of elegance, the sage,
By Fancy's genuine feelings unbeguil'd,
Of painful pedantry the poring child;
Who turns of these proud domes the historic page,
Now sunk by Time, and Henry's fiercer rage.
Think'st thou the warbling Muses never smil'd
On his lone hours? Ingenuous views engage
His thoughts, on themes unclassic falsely styl'd,
Intent. While cloister'd piety displays
Her mouldering roll, the piercing eye explores
New manners, and the pomp of elder days,
Whence culls the pensive bard his pictur'd stores.
Not rough nor barren are the winding ways
Of hoar Antiquity, but strewn with flowers."

Sonnet. Written at Stonehenge.

"Thou noblest monument of Albion's isle,
Whether, by Merlin's aid, from Scythia's shore
To Amber's fatal plain Pendragon bore,
Huge frame of giant hands, the mighty pile,
T' entomb his Britons slain by Hengist's guile:
Or Druid priests, sprinkled with human gore,
Taught 'mid thy massy maze their mystic lore:
Or Danish chiefs, enrich'd with savage spoil,
To victory's idol vast, an unhewn shrine,
Rear'd the rude heap, or in thy hollow'd ground
Repose the kings of Brutus' genuine line;
Or here those kings in solemn state were crown'd;
Studious to trace thy wondrous origin,
We muse on many an ancient tale renown'd."

Nothing can be more admirable than the learning here displayed, or the inference from it, that it is of no use but as it leads to interesting thought and reflection.

That written after seeing Wilton House is in the same style, but I prefer concluding with that to the river Lodon, which has a personal, as well as poetical, interest about it.

"Ah! what a weary race my feet have run,
Since first I trod thy banks with alders crown'd,
And thought my way was all through fairy ground,
Beneath the azure sky and golden sun:
When first my Muse to lisp her notes begun!
While pensive memory traces back the round

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Which fills the varied interval between;
Much pleasure, more of sorrow, marks the scene
Sweet native stream! those skies and suns so pure
No more return, to cheer my evening road!
Yet still one joy remains, that not obscure
Nor useless all my vacant days have flow'd
From youth's gay dawn to manhood's prime mature,
Nor with the Muse's laurel unbestow'd."

I have thus gone through all the names of this period I could think of, but I find there are others still waiting behind that I had never thought of. Here is a list of some of them—Pattison, Tickell, Hill, Somerville, Brown, Pitt, Wilkie, Dodsley, Shaw, Smart, Langhorne, Bruce, Greame, Glover, Lovibond, Penrose, Mickle, Jago, Scott, Whitehead, Jenyns, Logan, Cotton, Cunningham, and Blacklock. I think it will be best to let them pass and say nothing about them. It will be hard to persuade so many respectable persons that they are dull writers, and if we give them any praise, they will send others.

But here comes one whose claims cannot be so easily set aside: they have been sanctioned by learning, hailed by genius, and hallowed by misfortune—I mean Chatterton. Yet I must say what I think of him, and that is not what is generally thought. I pass over the disputes between the learned antiquaries, Dr. Mills, Herbert Croft, and Dr. Knox, whether he was to be placed after Shakspeare and Dryden, or to come after Shakspeare alone. A living poet has borne a better testimony to him—

"I thought of Chatterton, the marvellous boy,
The sleepless soul that perished in his pride;
And him* who walked in glory and in joy
Beside his plough along the mountain side."

I am loth to put asunder whom so great an authority has joined together; but I cannot find in Chatterton's works anything so extraordinary as the age at which they were written. They have a facility, vigour, and knowledge, which were prodigious in a boy of sixteen, but which would not have been so

* Burns.—These lines are taken from the introduction to Mr. Wordsworth's poem of the LEECH-GATHERER.

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in a man of twenty. He did not shew extraordinary powers of genius, but extraordinary precocity. Nor do I believe he would have written better had he lived. He knew this himself, or he would have lived. Great geniuses, like great kings, have too much to think of to kill themselves; for their mind to them also "a kingdom is." With an unaccountable power coming over him at an unusual age, and with the youthful confidence it inspired, he performed wonders, and was willing to set a seal on his reputation by a tragic catastrophe. He had done his best; and, like another Empedocles, threw himself into Ætna, to ensure immortality. The brazen slippers alone remain!—

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LECTURE VII

ON BURNS, AND THE OLD ENGLISH BALLADS.

I AM SORRY that what I said in the conclusion of the last Lecture, respecting Chatterton, should have given dissatisfaction to some persons, with whom I would willingly agree on all such matters. What I meant was less to call in question Chatterton's genius than to object to the common mode of estimating its magnitude by its prematureness. The lists of fame are not filled with the dates of births or deaths; and the side-mark of the age at which they were done wears out in works destined for immortality. Had Chatterton really done more, we should have thought less of him, for our attention would then have been fixed on the excellence of the works themselves, instead of the singularity of the circumstances in which they are produced. But because he attained to the full powers of manhood at an early age, I do not see that he would have attained to more than those powers, had he lived to be a man. He was a prodigy, because in him the ordinary march of nature was violently precipitated; and it is therefore inferred that he would have continued to hold on his course, "unslacked of motion." On the contrary, who knows but he might have lived to be poet-laureat? It is much better to let him remain as he was. Of his actual productions, any one may think as highly as he pleases; I would only guard against adding to the account of his *quantum meruit* those possible productions by which the learned rhapsodists of his time raised his gigantic pretensions to an equality with those of Homer and Shakspeare It is amusing to read some of these exaggerated descriptions, each rising above the other in extravagance. In Anderson's Life, we find that Mr Warton speaks of him "as a prodigy of genius," as "a singular instance of prematurity of abilities:" that may be true enough, and Warton was at any

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rate a competent judge; but Mr. Malone "believes him to have been the greatest genius that England has produced since the days of Shakspeare." Dr. Gregory says, "he must rank, as a universal genius, above Dryden, and perhaps only second to Shakspeare." Mr. Herbert Croft is still more unqualified in his praises; he asserts that "no such being, at any period of life, has ever been known, or possibly ever will be known." He runs a parallel between Chatterton and Milton; and asserts that "an army of Macedonian and Swedish mad butchers fly before him," meaning, I suppose, that Alexander the Great and Charles the Twelfth were nothing to him; "nor," he adds, "does my memory supply me with any human being, who, at such an age, with such advantages, has produced such compositions. Under the heathen mythology, superstition and admiration would have explained all, by bringing Apollo on earth; nor would the God ever have descended with more credit to himself."—Chatterton's physiognomy would at least have enabled him to pass *incognito*. It is quite different from the look of timid wonder and delight with which Annibal Caracci has painted a young Apollo listening to the first sounds he draws from a Pan's pipe, under the tutelage of the old Silenus! If Mr. Croft is sublime on the occasion, Dr. Knox is no less pathetic. "The testimony of Dr. Knox," says Dr. Anderson, (essays, p. 144,) "does equal credit to the classical taste and amiable benevolence of the writer, and the genius and reputation of Chatterton." "When I read," says the Doctor, "the researches of those learned antiquaries who have endeavoured to prove that the poems attributed to Rowley were really written by him, I observe many ingenious remarks in confirmation of their opinion, which it would be tedious, if not difficult, to controvert."

Now this is so far from the mark that the whole controversy might have been settled by any one but the learned antiquaries themselves, who had the smallest share of their learning, from this single circumstance, that the poems read as smooth as any modern poems, if you read them as modern compositions; and that you cannot read them, or make verse of them at all, if you pronounce or accent the words as they were spoken at the time when the poems were pretended to have been written. The

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whole secret of the imposture, which nothing but a deal of learned dust, raised by collecting and removing a great deal of learned rubbish, could have prevented our laborious critics from seeing through, lies on the face of it (to say nothing of the burlesque air which is scarcely disguised throughout) in the repetition of a few obsolete words, and in the mis-spelling of common ones.

"No sooner," proceeds the Doctor, "do I turn to the poems, than the labour of the antiquaries appears only waste of time; and I am involuntarily forced to join in placing that laurel, which he seems so well to have deserved, on the brow of Chatterton. The poems bear so many marks of superior genius that they have deservedly excited the general attention of polite scholars, and are considered as the most remarkable productions in modern poetry. We have many instances of poetical eminence at an early age; but neither Cowley, Milton, nor Pope, ever produced any thing while they were boys, which can justly be compared to the poems of Chatterton. The learned antiquaries do not indeed dispute their excellence. They extol it in the highest terms of applause. They raise their favourite Rowley to a rivalry with Homer: but they make the very merits of the works an argument against their real author. 'Is it possible,' say they, 'that a boy should produce compositions so beautiful and masterly?' That a common boy should produce them is not possible," rejoins the Doctor; "but that they should be produced by a boy of an extraordinary genius, such as was that of Homer or Shakspeare, though a prodigy, is such a one as by no means exceeds the bounds of rational credibility."

Now it does not appear that Shakspeare or Homer were such early prodigies; so that by this reasoning he must take precedence of them too, as well as of Milton, Cowley, and Pope. The reverend and classical writer then breaks out into the following melancholy raptures:—

"Unfortunate boy! short and evil were thy days, but thy fame shall be immortal. Hadst thou been known to the munificent patrons of genius.....

"Unfortunate boy! poorly wast thou accommodated during thy short sojourning here among us;—rudely wast thou treat-

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ed—sorely did thy feelings suffer from the scorn of the unworthy; and there at last those who wish to rob thee of thy only meed, thy posthumous glory. Severe too are the censures of thy morals. In the gloomy moments of despondency, I fear thou hast uttered impious and blasphemous thoughts. But let thy more rigid censors reflect that thou wast literally and strictly but a boy. Let many of thy bitterest enemies reflect what were their own religious principles, and whether they had any, at the age of fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen. Surely it is a severe and an unjust surmise that thou wouldst probably have ended thy life as a victim to the laws, if thou hadst not ended it as thou didst."

Enough, enough, of the learned antiquaries, and of the classical and benevolent testimony of Dr. Knox. Chatterton was, indeed, badly enough off; but he was at least saved from the pain and shame of reading this woful lamentation over fallen genius, which circulates, splendidly bound, in the fourteenth edition, while he is a prey to worms. As to those who are really capable of admiring Chatterton's genius, or of feeling an interest in his fate, I would only say that I never heard any one speak of any one of his works as if it were an old well-known favourite, and had become a faith and a religion in his mind. It is his name, his youth, and what he might have lived to have done, that excite our wonder and admiration. He has the same sort of posthumous fame that an actor of the last age has—an abstracted reputation which is independent of any thing we know of his works. The admirers of Collins never think of him without recalling to their minds his Ode on the Evening, or on the Poetical Character. Gray's Elegy, and his popularity, are identified together, and inseparable even in imagination. It is the same with respect to Burns: when you speak of him as a poet, you mean his works, his Tam o' Shanter, or his Cotter's Saturday Night. But the enthusiasts for Chatterton, if you ask for the proofs of his extraordinary genius, are obliged to turn to the volume, and perhaps find there what they seek; but it is not in their minds; and it is of *that* I spoke.

The Minstrel's song in Ælla is, I think, the best.

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"O! synge untoe my roundelaie
O! droppe the brynie teare wythe mee,
Daunce ne moe atte hallie daie,
Lycke a rennynge ryver bee.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Blacke hys cryne as the wyntere nyght,
Whyte hys rode as the sommer snowe,
Rodde hys face as the mornynge lyghte,
Cale he lyes ynne the grave belowe.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Swote hys tongue as the throstles note,
Quycke ynne daunce as thought cann bee,
Defte his taboure, codgelle stote,
O! hee lys bie the wyllowe-tree.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Hark! the ravenne flappes hys wynge,
In the briered dell belowe;
Harke! the dethe-owle loude dothe synge,
To the nyghte-mares as theie goe.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

See! the whyte moone sheenes onne hie;
Whyterre ys mie true loves shroude;
Whyterre yanne the mornynge skie,
Whyterre yanne the evenynge cloude.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Heere, upon mie true loves grave,
Schalle the baren fleurs be layde,
Ne one hallie seyncte to save
Al the celness of a mayde.
Mie love ys deddee,
Gonne to his deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

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Wythe mie hondes I'll dent the brieres
Rounde hys hallie corse to gre,
Ouphante fairies, lyghte your fyres,
Heere my boddie stille schalle bee.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to hys deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Comme, wythe acorne-coppe and thorne,
Drayne my hartys blodde awaie;
Lyfe and all yttes goode I scorne,
Daunce bie nete, or feaste by daie.
Mie love ys dedde,
Gonne to his deathe-bedde,
Al under the wyllowe-tree.

Water wytches, crewnede wythe reytes,
Bere mee to yer leathalle tyde.
I die; I comme; mie true love waytes.
Thos the damselle spake, and dyed."

To proceed to the more immediate subject of the present Lecture, the character and writings of Burns.—Shakspeare says of some one, that "he was like a man made after supper of a cheese-paring." Burns, the poet, was not such a man. He had a strong mind, and a strong body, the fellow to it. He had a real heart of flesh and blood beating in his bosom—you can almost hear it throb. Some one said, that if you had shaken hands with him, his hand would have burnt yours. The gods, indeed, "made him poetical;" but nature had a hand in him first. His heart was in the right place. He did not "create a soul under the ribs of death," by tinkling siren sounds, or by piling up centos of poetic diction; but for the artificial flowers of poetry, he plucked the mountain-daisy under his feet; and a field-mouse, hurrying from its ruined dwelling, could inspire him with the sentiments of terror and pity. He held the plough or the pen with the same firm, manly grasp; nor did he cut out poetry as we cut out watch-papers, with finical dexterity, nor from the same flimsy materials. Burns was not like Shakspeare in the range of his genius; but there is something of the same magnanimity, directness, and unaffected character about him. He was not a sickly sentimentalist, a namby-pamby poet,

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a mincing metre ballad-monger, any more than Shakspeare. He would as soon hear "a brazen candlestick tuned, or a dry wheel grate on the axletree." He was as much of a man—not a twentieth part as much of a poet—as Shakspeare. With but little of his imagination or inventive power, he had the same life of mind: within the narrow circle of personal feeling or domestic incidents, the pulse of his poetry flows as healthily and vigorously. He had an eye to see; a heart to feel:—no more. His pictures of good fellowship, of social glee, of quaint humour, are equal to anything; they come up to nature, and they cannot go beyond. The sly jest collected in his laughing eye at the sight of the grotesque and ludicrous in manners—the large tear rolled down his manly cheek at the sight of another's distress. He has made us as well acquainted with himself as it is possible to be; has let out the honest impulses of his native disposition, the unequal conflict of the passions in his breast, with the same frankness and truth of description. His strength is not greater than his weakness: his virtues were greater than his vices. His virtues belonged to his genius: his vices to his situation, which did not correspond to his genius.

It has been usual to attack Burns's moral character, and the moral tendency of his writings at the same time; and Mr. Wordsworth, in a letter to Mr. Gray, Master of the High School at Edinburgh, in attempting to defend, has only laid him open to a more serious and unheard-of responsibility. Mr. Gray might very well have sent him back, in return for his epistle, the answer of Holofernes in Love's Labour Lost:—"*Via* goodman Dull, thou hast spoken no word all this while." The author of this performance, which is as weak in effect as it is pompous in pretension, shows a great dislike of Robespierre, Buonaparte, and of Mr. Jeffrey, whom he, by some unaccountable fatality, classes together as the three most formidable enemies of the human race that have appeared in his (Mr. Wordsworth's) remembrance; but he betrays very little liking to Burns. He is, indeed, anxious to get him out of the unhallowed clutches of the Edinburgh Reviewers (as a mere matter of poetical privilege,) only to bring him before a graver and higher tribunal, which is his own; and, after repeating and insinuating ponderous

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charges against him, shakes his head, and declines giving any opinion in so tremendous a case; so that, though the judgment of the former critic is set aside, poor Burns remains just where he was, and nobody gains anything by the cause but Mr. Wordsworth, in an increasing opinion of his own wisdom and purity. "Out upon this half-faced fellowship!" The author of the Lyrical Ballads has thus missed a fine opportunity of doing Burns justice and himself honour. He might have shown himself a philosophical prose-writer, as well as a philosophical poet. He might have offered as amiable and as gallant a defence of the Muses as my uncle Toby, in the honest simplicity of his heart, did of the army. He might have said at once, instead of making a parcel of wry faces over the matter, that Burns had written Tam o' Shanter, and that that alone was enough; that he could hardly have described the excesses of mad, hairbrained, roaring mirth, and convivial indulgence, which are the soul of it, if he himself had not "drunk full ofter of the tun than of the well"—unless "the act and practique part of life had been the mistress of his theorique." Mr. Wordsworth might have quoted such lines as—

> "The landlady and Tam grew gracious,
> Wi' favours, secret, sweet, and precious;"—

or,

> "Care, mad to see a man so happy,
> E'en drowned himself amang the nappy;"—

and fairly confessed that he could not have written such lines from a want of proper habits and previous sympathy; and that, till some great puritanical genius should arise to do these things equally well without any knowledge of them, the world might forgive Burns the injuries he had done his health and fortune in his poetical apprenticeship to experience, for the pleasure he had afforded them. Instead of this, Mr. Wordsworth hints that, with different personal habits and greater strength of mind, Burns would have written differently, and almost as well as he does. He might have taken that line of Gay's,

> "The fly that sips treacle is lost in the sweets,"—

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and applied it in all its force and pathos to the poetical character. He might have argued that poets are men of genius, and that a man of genius is not a machine; that they live in a state of intellectual intoxication, and that it is too much to expect them to be distinguished by peculiar *sang froid*, circumspection, and sobriety. Poets are by nature men of stronger imagination and keener sensibilities than others; and it is a contradiction to suppose them at the same time governed only by the cool, dry, calculating dictates of reason and foresight. Mr. Wordsworth might have ascertained the boundaries that part the provinces of reason and imagination:—that it is the business of the understanding to exhibit things in their relative proportions and ultimate consequences—of the imagination to insist on their immediate impressions, and to indulge their strongest impulses; but it is the poet's office to pamper the imagination of his readers and his own with the extremes of present ecstasy or agony, to snatch the swift-winged golden minutes, the torturing hour, and to banish the dull, prosaic, monotonous realities of life, both from his thoughts and from his practice. Mr. Wordsworth might have shown how it is that all men of genius, or of originality and independence of mind, are liable to practical errors, from the very confidence their superiority inspires, which makes them fly in the face of custom and prejudice, always rashly, sometimes unjustly; for, after all, custom and prejudice are not without foundation in truth and reason, and no one individual is a match for the world in power, very few in knowledge. The world may altogether be set down as older and wiser than any single person in it.

Again, our philosophical letter-writer might have enlarged on the temptations to which Burns was exposed from his struggles with fortune and the uncertainty of his fate. He might have shown how a poet, not born to wealth or title, was kept in a constant state of feverish anxiety with respect to his fame and the means of a precarious livelihood: that, "from being chilled with poverty, steeped in contempt, he had passed into the sunshine of fortune, and was lifted to the very pinnacle of public favour;" yet even there could not count on the continuance of success, but was, "like the giddy sailor on the mast, ready with

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every blast to topple down into the fatal bowels of the deep!" He might have traced his habit of ale-house tippling to the last long precious draught of his favourite usquebaugh, which he took in the prospect of bidding farewell forever to his native land; and his conjugal infidelities to his first disappointment in love, which would not have happened to him if he had been born to a small estate in land, or bred up behind a counter!

Lastly, Mr. Wordsworth might have shown the incompatibility between the Muses and the Excise, which never agreed well together, or met in one seat, till they were unaccountably reconciled on Rydal Mount. He must know (no man better) the distraction created by the opposite calls of business and of fancy, the torment of extents, the plague of receipts laid in order or mislaid, the disagreeableness of exacting penalties or paying the forfeiture; and how all this (together with the broaching of casks and the splashing of beer-barrels) must have preyed upon a mind like Burns's, with more than his natural sensibility and none of his acquired firmness.

Mr. Coleridge, alluding to this circumstance of the promotion of the Scottish Bard to be "a gauger of ale-firkins," in a poetical epistle to his friend Charles Lamb, calls upon him, in a burst of heart-felt indignation, to gather a wreath of henbane, nettles, and nightshade,

"——— To twine
The illustrious brow of Scotch nobility."

If, indeed, Mr. Lamb had undertaken to write a letter in defence of Burns, how different would it have been from this of Mr. Wordsworth's! How much better than I can even imagine it to have been done!

It is hardly reasonable to look for a hearty or genuine defence of Burns from the pen of Mr. Wordsworth; for there is no common link of sympathy between them. Nothing can be more different or hostile than the spirit of their poetry. Mr. Wordsworth's poetry is the poetry of mere sentiment and pensive contemplation: Burns's is a very highly sublimated essence of animal existence. With Burns, "self-love and social are the same"—

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"And we'll tak a cup of kindness yet,
For auld lang syne."

Mr. Wordsworth is "himself alone," a recluse philosopher, or a reluctant spectator of the scenes of many-coloured life; moralising on them, not describing, not entering into them. Robert Burns has exerted all the vigour of his mind, all the happiness of his nature, in exalting the pleasures of wine, of love, and good fellowship: but in Mr. Wordsworth there is a total disunion and divorce of the faculties of the mind from those of the body: the banns are forbid, or a separation is austerely pronounced from bed and board—*a mensâ et thoro*. From the Lyrical Ballads, it does not appear that men eat or drink, marry or are given in marriage. If we lived by every sentiment that proceeded out of mouths, and not by bread or wine, or if the species were continued like trees (to borrow an expression from the great Sir Thomas Brown,) Mr. Wordsworth's poetry would be just as good as ever. It is not so with Burns: he is "famous for the keeping it up," and in his verse is ever fresh and gay. For this, it seems, he has fallen under the displeasure of the Edinburgh Reviewers, and the still more formidable patronage of Mr. Wordsworth's pen.

"This, this was the unkindest cut of all."

I was going to give some extracts out of this composition in support of what I have said, but I find them too tedious. Indeed (if I may be allowed to speak my whole mind, under correction) Mr. Wordsworth could not be in any way expected to tolerate or give a favourable interpretation to Burns's constitutional foibles—even his best virtues are not good enough for him. He is repelled and driven back into himself, not less by the worth than by the faults of others. His taste is as exclusive and repugnant as his genius. It is because so few things give him pleasure that he gives pleasure to so few people. It is not every one who can perceive the sublimity of a daisy, or the pathos to be extracted from a withered thorn!

To proceed from Burns's patrons to his poetry, than which no two things can be more different. His "Twa Dogs" is a very spirited piece of description, both as it respects the animal and

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human creation, and conveys a very vivid idea of the manners both of high and low life. The burlesque panegyric of the first dog,

> "His locked, lettered, braw brass collar
> Show'd him the gentleman and scholar,"—

reminds one of Launce's account of his dog Crabbe, where he is said, as an instance of his being in the way of promotion, "to have got among three or four gentleman-like dogs under the Duke's table." The "Halloween" is the most striking and picturesque description of local customs and scenery. The Brigs of Ayr, the Address to a Haggis, Scotch Drink, and innumerable others, are, however, full of the same kind of characteristic and comic painting. But his masterpiece in this way is his Tam o' Shanter. I shall give the beginning of it, but I am afraid I shall hardly know when to leave off

> "When chapman billies leave the street,
> And drouthy neebours neebours meet,
> As market-days are wearing late,
> And folk begin to tak' the gate;
> While we sit bousing at the nappy,
> And getting fou and unco happy,
> We think na on the lang Scots miles,
> The mosses, waters, slaps, and styles,
> That lie between us and our hame,
> Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,
> Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
> Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.
>
> This truth fand honest Tam o' Shanter,
> As he frae Ayr ae night did canter;
> (Auld Ayr, wham ne'er a town surpasses
> For honest men and bonny lasses.)
>
> O Tam! hadst thou but been sae wise,
> As ta'en thy ain wife Kate's advice!
> She tauld thee weel thou was a skellum,
> A blethering, blustering, drunken blellum;
> That frae November till October
> Ae market-day thou was na sober;
> That ilka melder, wi' the miller,
> Thou sat as lang as thou had siller;
> That ev'ry naig was ca'd a shoe on,
> The smith and thee gat roaring fou on;

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That at the Lord's house, ev'n on Sunday,
Thou drank wi' Kirton Jean till Monday—
She prophesy'd, that, late or soon,
Thou wad be found deep drown'd in Doon;
Or catch't wi' warlocks in the mirk,
By Alloway's auld haunted kirk.
Ah, gentle dames! it gars me greet,
To think how mony counsels sweet,
How mony lengthen'd, sage advices,
The husband frae the wife despises!
But to our tale: Ae market night,
Tam had got planted unco right
Fast by an ingle, bleezing finely,
Wi' reaming swats, that drank divinely;
And at his elbow, Souter Johnny,
His ancient, trusty, drouthy crony;
Tam lo'ed him like a vera brither;
They had been fou for weeks thegither.
The night drave on wi' sangs and clatter,
And aye the ale was growing better:
The landlady and Tam grew gracious
Wi' favours secret, sweet, and precious:
The Souter tauld his queerest stories;
The landlord's laugh was ready chorus:
The storm without might rair and rustle,
Tam did na mind the storm a whistle.
Care, mad to see a man sae happy,
E'en drown'd himsel amang the nappy;
As bees flee hame wi' lades o' treasure,
The minutes wing'd their way wi' pleasure:
Kings may be blest, but Tam was glorious,
O'er a' the ills of life victorious!
But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flow'r—its bloom is shed;
Or like the snow, falls in the river,
A moment white—then melts forever;
Or like the Borealis race,
That flit ere you can point their place;
Or like the rainbow's lovely form,
Evanishing amid the storm.—
Nae man can tether time or tide,
The hour approaches, Tam maun ride;
That hour o' night's black arch the key-stane,
That dreary hour he mounts his beast in,
And sic a night he taks the road in,
As ne'er poor sinner was abroad in.

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The wind blew as 'twad blawn its last;
The rattling showers rose on the blast,
The speedy gleams the darkness swallow'd,
Loud, deep, and lang, the thunder bellow'd:
That night a child might understand
The Deil had business on his hand.
Weel mounted on his gray mare, Meg,
A better never lifted leg,
Tam skelpit on thro' dub and mire,
Despising wind, and rain, and fire;
Whiles hauding fast his gude blue bonnet;
Whiles crooning o'er some auld Scots sonnet;
Whiles glowring round wi' prudent cares,
Lest bogles catch him unawares;
Kirk-Alloway was drawing nigh,
Whare ghaists and houlets nightly cry.—
By this time Tam was cross the ford,
Whare in the snaw, the chapman smoor'd;
And past the birks and meikle stane,
Whare drunken Charlie brak's neck-bane;
And thro' the whins, and by the cairn,
Whare hunters fand the murder'd bairn;
And near the thorn, aboon the well,
Whare Mungo's mither hang'd herael.—
Before him Doon pours all his floods;
The doubling storm roars thro' the woods;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
Near and more near the thunders roll:
Whan, glimmering thro' the groaning trees,
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze;
Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing;
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.
Inspiring bold John Barleycorn!
What dangers thou canst make us scorn!
Wi' Tippenny, we fear nae evil,
Wi' Usquebæ, we'll face the devil!
The swats sae ream'd in Tammie's noddle,
Fair play, he car'd na de'ils a boddle.
But Maggie stood right sair astonish'd,
Till, by the hee and hand admonish'd,
She ventur'd forward on the light,
And, wow! Tam saw an unco sight!
Warlocks and witches in a dance,
Nae light cotillion new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.

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As winnock-bunker, in the east,
There sat auld Nick, in shape o' beast;
A touzie tyke, black, grim, and large,
To gie them music was his charge;
He screw'd the pipes, and gart them skirl,
Till roof and rafters a' did dirl.—
Coffins stood round like open presses,
That shaw'd the dead in their last dresses;
And, by some devilish cantrip slight,
Each in its cauld hand held a light—
By which heroic Tam was able
To note upon the haly table
A murderer's banes in gibbet-airns;
Twa span-lang, wee, unchristen'd bairns;
A thief, new cutted frae a rope,
Wi' his last gasp his gab did gape;
Five tomahawks, wi' bluid red rusted;
Five scimitars, wi' murder crusted;
A garter, which a babe had strangled;
A knife, a father's throat had mangled,
Whom his ain son o' life bereft,
The gray hairs yet stack to the heft;
Wi' mair o' horrible and awfu',
Which e'en to name wad be unlawfu'.
As Tammie glowr'd, amaz'd and curious,
The mirth and fun grew fast and furious:
The Piper loud and louder blew;
The dancers quick and quicker flew;
They reel'd, they set, they cross'd, they cleekit,
Till ilka Carlin swat and reekit,
And coost her duddies to the wark,
And linket at it in her sark!
Now Tam, O Tam! had they been queans
A' plump and strapping in their teens;
Their sarks, instead o' creeshie flannen,
Been snaw-white seventeen hundred linen!
Thir breeks o' mine, my only pair,
That anee were plush, o' gude blue hair,
I wad hae gi'en them aff my hurdies,
For ae blink o' the bonnie burdies!
But wither'd beldams, auld and droll,
Rigwoodie hags wad spean a foal,
Louping and flinging on a crummock,
I wonder did na turn thy stomach.
But Tam ken'd what was what fu' brawly,
There was ae winsome wench and wawly,

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That night enlisted in the core,
(Lang after ken'd on Carrick shore;
For mony a beast to dead she shot,
And perish'd mony a bonnie boat,
And shook baith meikle corn and bear,
And kept the country-side in fear—)
Her cutty sark o' Paisely harn,
That while a lassie she had worn,
In longitude tho' sorely scanty,
It was her best, and she was vaunty.—
Ah! little ken'd thy reverend grannie,
That sark she coft for her wee Nannie,
Wi' twa pund Scots ('twas a' her riches,)
Wad ever grac'd a dance of witches!
But here my Muse her wing maun cour;
Sic flights are far beyond her power:
To sing how Nannie lap and flang,
(A souple jade she was, and strang)
And how Tam stood like ane bewitch'd,
And thought his very een enrich'd;
Ev'n Satan glowr'd and fidg'd fu' fain,
And hotch't, and blew wi' might and main;
Till first ae caper, syne anither,
Tam tint his reason a' thegither,
And roars out, 'Weel done, Cutty Sark!'
And in an instant all was dark;
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied,
When out the hellish legion sallied.
As bees biz out wi' angry fyke;
When plundering herds assail their byke
As open pussie's mortal foes,
When, pop! she starts before their nose;
As eager rins the market-crowd,
When 'Catch the thief!' resounds aloud;
So Maggie rins—the witches follow,
Wi' mony an eldritch skreech and hollow,
Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin'!
In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin'!
In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin'!
Kate soon will be a waefu' woman!
Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,
And win the key-stane o' the brig;
There, at them thou thy tail may toss,
A running stream they dare na cross;
But ere the key-stane she could make,
The fient a tail she had to shake!

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For Nannie, far before the rest,
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle:
But little wist she Maggie's mettle—
Ae spring brought aff her master hale,
But left behind her ain grey tail:
The Carlin claught her by the rump,
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump.
Now, wha this tale of truth shall read,
Ilk man and mother's son tak heed:
Whane'er to drink you are inclin'd,
Or Cutty Sarks rin in your mind,
Think, ye may buy the joys owre dear;
Remember Tam o' Shanter's mare."

Burns has given the extremes of licentious eccentricity and convivial enjoyment, in the story of this scape-grace, and of patriarchial simplicity and gravity in describing the old national character of the Scottish peasantry. The Cotter's Saturday Night is a noble and pathetic picture of human manners, mingled with a fine religious awe. It comes over the mind like a slow and solemn strain of music. The soul of the poet aspires from this scene of low-thoughted care, and reposes, in trembling hope, on "the bosom of its Father and its God." Hardly any thing can be more touching than the following stanzas, for instance, whether as they describe human interests, or breathe a lofty devotional spirit.

"The toil-worn Cotter frae his labour goes,
This night his weekly moil is at an end,
Collects his spades, his mattocks, and his hoes,
Hoping the morn in ease and rest to spend,
And weary, o'er the moor, his course does hameward bend.

At length his lonely cot appears in view,
Beneath the shelter of an aged tree;
Th' expectant wee-things, toddlin, stacher through
To meet their dad, wi' flichterin noise and glee.
His wee-bit ingle, blinkin bonilie,
His clean hearth-stane, his thriftie wifie's smile,
The lisping infant, prattling on his knee,
Does a' his weary carking cares beguile,
And makes him quite forget his labour and his toil.

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Belyve, the elder bairns come drapping in
At service out, amang the farmers roun',
Some ca' the pleugh, some herd, some tentie rin
A cannie errand to a neebor town;
Their eldest hope, their Jenny, woman-grown,
In youthfu' bloom, love sparkling in her e'e,
Comes hame, perhaps, to show a braw new gown,
Or deposite her sair-won penny-fee,
To help her parents dear, if they in hardship be.

Wi' joy unfeign'd, brothers and sisters meet,
And each for other's welfare kindly spiers;
The social hours, swift-wing'd, unnotic'd fleet;
Each tells the uncos that he sees or hears:
The parents, partial, eye their hopeful years;
Anticipation forward points the view;
The mither, wi' her needle and her shears,
Gars auld claes look amaist as weel's the new;
The father mixes a' wi' admonition due.

* * * *

But, hark! a rap comes gently to the door;
Jenny, wha kens the meaning o' the same,
Tells how a neebor lad cam o'er the moor,
To do some errands, and convoy her hame.
The wily mother sees the conscious flame
Sparkle in Jenny's e'e, and flush her cheek;
With heart-struck, anxious care, inquires his name,
While Jenny hafflins is afraid to speak;
Weel pleas'd the mother hears it's nae wild, worthless rake.

Wi' kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben;
A strappan youth; he taks the mother's eye;
Blithe Jenny sees the visit's no ill ta'en;
The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.
The younguter's artless heart o'erflows wi' joy,
But blate an' laithfu', scarce can weel behave:
The mother, wi' a woman's wiles, can spy
What makes the youth sae bashfu' an' sae grave;
Weel-pleas'd to think her bairn's respected like the lave.

But now the supper crowns their simple board,
The halesome parritch, chief o' Scotia's food:
The soupe their only hawkie does afford,
That 'yont the hallan snugly chows her cood:
The dame brings forth, in complimental mood,
To grace the lad, her weel-hained kebbuck, fell,
An' aft he's prest, an' aft he ca's it guid;

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The frugal wife, garrulous, will tell,
How 'twas a towmond auld, sin' lint was i' the bell.

The cheerfu' supper done, wi' serious face,
They, round the ingle, form a circle wide;
The sire turns o'er, with patriarchal grace,
The big ha'-Bible, ance his father's pride:
His bonnet rev'rently is laid aside,
His lyart haffets wearing thin an' bare;
Those strains that once did sweet in Zion glide,
He wales a portion wi' judicious care;
And "Let us worship God!" he says, with solemn air.

They chant their artless notes in simple guise;
They tune their hearts, by far the noblest aim:
Perhaps Dundee's wild-warbling measures rise,
Or plaintive Martyrs, worthy of the name;
Or noble Elgin beets the heav'nward flame,
The sweetest far of Scotia's holy lays:
Compar'd with these, Italian trills are tame;
The tickled ears no heart-felt raptures raise;
Nae unison hae they with our Creator's praise."

Burns's poetical epistles to his friends are admirable, whether for the touches of satire, the painting of character, or the sincerity of friendship they display. Those to Captain Grose, and to Davie, a brother poet, are among the best: they are "the true pathos and sublime of human life." His prose-letters are sometimes tinctured with affectation. They seem written by a man who has been admired for his wit, and is expected on all occasions to shine. Those in which he expresses his ideas of natural beauty in reference to Alison's Essay on Taste, and advocates the keeping up the remembrances of old customs and seasons, are the most powerfully written. His English serious odes and moral stanzas are, in general, failures, such as The Lament, Man was made to Mourn, &c.; nor do I much admire his "Scots wha hae wi' Wallace bled." In this strain of didactic or sentimental moralising, the lines to Glencairn are the most happy and impressive. His imitations of the old humorous ballad style of Ferguson's songs are no whit inferior to the admirable originals, such as "John Anderson, my Joe," and many more. But of all his productions, the pathetic and

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serious love-songs which he has left behind him, in the manner of the old ballads, are perhaps those which take the deepest and most lasting hold on the mind. Such are the lines to Mary Morison, and those entitled Jessy.

"Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear—
Here's a health to ane I lo'e dear—
Thou art sweet as the smile when fond lovers meet,
And soft as their parting tear—Jessy!

Altho' thou maun never be mine,
Altho' even hope is denied;
'Tis sweeter for thee despairing
Than aught in the world beside—Jessy!"

The conclusion of the other is as follows:

"Yestreen, when to the trembling string
The dance gaed through the lighted ha',
To thee my fancy took its wing,
I sat, but neither heard nor saw.
Tho' this was fair, and that was braw,
And yon the toast of a' the town,
I sighed, and said among them a',
Ye are na Mary Morison."

That beginning, "Oh gin my love were a bonny red rose," is a piece of rich and fantastic description. One would think that nothing could surpass these in beauty of expression, and in true pathos: and nothing does or can, but some of the old Scotch ballads themselves. There is in them a still more original cast of thought, a more romantic imagery—the thistle's glittering down, the gilliflower on the old garden-wall, the horseman's silver bells, the hawk on its perch—a closer intimacy with nature, a firmer reliance on it, as the only stock of wealth which the mind has to resort to, a more infantine simplicity of manners, a greater strength of affection, hopes longer cherished and longer deferred, sighs that the heart dare hardly heave, and "thoughts that often lie too deep for tears." We seem to feel that those who wrote and sung them (the early minstrels) lived in the open air, wandering on from place to place with restless feet and thoughts, and lending an ever-open ear to the fearful accidents of war or love, floating on the breath of old

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tradition or common fame, and moving the strings of their harp with sounds that sank into a nation's heart. How fine an illustration of this is that passage in Don Quixote, where the knight and Sancho, going in search of Dulcinea, inquire their way of the countryman, who was driving his mules to plough before break of day, "singing the ancient ballad of Roncesvalles." Sir Thomas Overbury describes his country girl as still accompanied with fragments of old songs. One of the best and most striking descriptions of the effects of this mixture of national poetry and music is to be found in one of the letters of Archbishop Herring, giving an account of a confirmation-tour in the mountains of Wales.

"That pleasure over, our work became very arduous, for we were to mount a rock, and in many places of the road, over natural stairs of stone. I submitted to this, which they told me was but a taste of the country, and to prepare me for worse things to come. However, worse things did not come that morning, for we dined soon after out of our own wallets; and, though our inn stood in a place of the most frightful solitude, and the best formed for the habitation of monks (who once possessed it) in the world, yet we made a cheerful meal. The novelty of the thing gave me spirits, and the air gave me appetite much keener than the knife I ate with. We had our music too; for there came in a harper, who soon drew about us a group of figures that Hogarth would have given any price for. The harper was in his true place and attitude; a man and woman stood before him, singing to his instrument wildly, but not disagreeably; a little dirty child was playing with the bottom of the harp; a woman in a sick night-cap hanging over the stairs; a boy with crutches, fixed in a staring attention, and a girl carding wool in the chimney, and rocking a cradle with her naked feet, interrupted in her business by the charms of the music; all ragged and dirty, and all silently attentive. These figures gave us a most entertaining picture, and would please you or any man of observation; and one reflection gave me a particular comfort, that the assembly before us demonstrated that even here the influential sun warmed poor mortals, and inspired them with love and music."

I could wish that Mr. Wilkie had been recommended to take this group as the subject of his admirable pencil; he has painted a picture of Bathsheba, instead.

In speaking of the old Scotch ballads, I need do no more than mention the name of Auld Robin Gray. The effect of reading this old ballad is as if all our hopes and fears hung upon the

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last fibre of the heart, and we felt that giving way. What silence, what loneliness, what leisure for grief and despair!

"My father pressed me sair,
Though my mother did na' speak;
But she looked in my face
Till my heart was like to break."

The irksomeness of the situations, the sense of painful dependence, is excessive; and yet the sentiment of deep-rooted, patient affection triumphs over all, and is the only impression that remains. Lady Ann Bothwell's Lament is not, I think, quite equal to the lines beginning—

"O waly, waly, up the bank,
And waly, waly, down the brae,
And waly, waly, yon burn side,
Where I and my love wont to gae.
I leant my back unto an aik,
I thought it was a trusty tree;
But first it bow'd, and syne it brak,
Sae my true-love's forsaken me.

O waly, waly, love is bonny,
A little time while it is new;
But when it's auld, it waxeth cauld,
And fades awa' like the morning dew.
Whan cockle-shells turn siller bells,
And muscles grow on every tree,
Whan frost and snaw sall warm us aw,
Then sall my love prove true to me.

Now Arthur seat sall be my bed,
The sheets sall ne'er be fyld by me:
Saint Anton's well sall be my drink,
Since my true-love's forsaken me.
Martinmas wind, when wilt thou blaw,
And shake the green leaves aff the tree?
O gentle death, whan wilt thou cum
And tak' a life that wearies me?

'Tis not the frost that freezes sae,
Nor blawing snaw's inclemencie,
'Tis not sic cauld, that makes me cry,
But my love's heart grown cauld to me.

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Whan we came in by Glasgow town,
We were a comely sight to see,
My love was clad in black velvet,
And I myself in cramasie.

But had I wist, before I kist,
That love had been sae hard to win;
I'd lockt my heart in case of gowd,
And pinn'd it with a siller pin.
And oh! if my poor babe were born,
And set upon the nurse's knee,
And I mysel in the cold grave!
Since my true-love's forsaken me."

The finest modern imitation of this style is the Braes of Yarrow; and perhaps the finest subject for a story of the same kind, in any modern book, is that told in Turner's History of England, of a Mahometan woman, who, having fallen in love with an English merchant, the father of Thomas à Becket, followed him all the way to England, knowing only the word London, and the name of her lover, Gilbert.

But to have done with this, which is rather too serious a subject.—The old English ballads are of a gayer and more lively turn. They are adventurous and romantic; but they relate chiefly to good living and good fellowship, to drinking and hunting scenes. Robin Hood is the chief of these, and he still, in imagination, haunts Sherwood Forest. The archers green glimmer under the waving branches; the print on the grass remains where they have just finished their noontide meal under the green-wood tree; and the echo of their bugle-horn and twanging bows resounds through the tangled mazes of the forest, as the tall slim deer glances startled by.

"The trees in Sherwood Forest are old and good
The grass beneath them now is dimly green:
Are they deserted all? Is no young mien,
With loose-slung bugle, met within the wood?

No arrow found—foil'd of its antler'd food—
Struck in the oak's rude side?—Is there nought seen
To mark the revelries which there have been,
In the sweet days of merry Robin Hood?

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Go there with summer, and with evening—go
In the soft shadows, like some wand'ring man—
And thou shalt far amid the forest know
The archer-men in green, with belt and bow,
Feasting on pheasant, river-fowl, and swan,
With Robin at their head, and Marian." *

* Sonnet on Sherwood Forest, by J. H. Reynolds.

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LECTURE VIII.

ON THE LIVING POETS.

"No more of talk where God or Angel guest
With man, as with his friend, familiar us'd
To sit indulgent."———

Genius is the heir of fame; but the hard condition on which the bright reversion must be earned is the loss of life. Fame is the recompense not of the living, but of the dead. The temple of fame stands upon the grave: the flame that burns upon its altars is kindled from the ashes of great men. Fame itself is immortal, but it is not begot till the breath of genius is extinguished. For fame is not popularity, the shout of the multitude, the idle buzz of fashion, the venal puff, the soothing flattery of favour or of friendship; but it is the spirit of a man surviving himself in the minds and thoughts of other men, undying and imperishable. It is the power which the intellect exercises over the intellect, and the lasting homage which is paid to it, as such, independently of time and circumstances, purified from partiality and evil-speaking.—Fame is the sound which the stream of high thoughts, carried down to future ages, makes as it flows—deep, distant, murmuring evermore like the waters of the mighty ocean. He who has ears truly touched to this music is in a manner deaf to the voice of popularity. The love of fame differs from mere vanity in this,—that the one is immediate and personal, the other ideal and abstracted. It is not the direct and gross homage paid to himself, that the lover of true fame seeks or is proud of; but the indirect and pure homage paid to the eternal forms of truth and beauty as they are reflected in his mind, that gives him confidence and hope. The love of nature is the first thing in the mind of the true poet: the admiration of himself the last. A man of genius cannot well be a coxcomb; for his mind is too

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full of other things to be much occupied with his own person. He who is conscious of great powers in himself has also a high standard of excellence with which to compare his efforts: he appeals also to a test and judge of merit, which is the highest, but which is too remote, grave, and impartial, to flatter his self-love extravagantly, or puff him up with intolerable and vain conceit. This, indeed, is one test of genius and of real greatness of mind, whether a man can wait patiently and calmly for the award of posterity, satisfied with the unwearied exercise of his faculties, retired within the sanctuary of his own thoughts; or whether he is eager to forestal his own immortality, and mortgage it for a newspaper puff. He who thinks much of himself will be in danger of being forgotten by the rest of the world: he who is always trying to lay violent hands on reputation will not secure the best and most lasting. If the restless candidate for praise takes no pleasure, no sincere and heartfelt delight in his works, but as they are admired and applauded by others, what should others see in them to admire or applaud? They cannot be expected to admire them because they are *his*; but for the truth and nature contained in them, which must first be inly felt and copied with severe delight, from the love of truth and nature, before it can ever appear there. Was Raphael, think you, when he painted his pictures of the Virgin and Child in all their inconceivable truth and beauty of expression, thinking most of his subject or of himself? Do you suppose that Titian, when he painted a landscape, was pluming himself on being thought the finest colourist in the world, or making himself so by looking at nature? Do you imagine that Shakspeare, when he wrote Lear or Othello, was thinking of anything but Lear and Othello? Or that Mr. Kean, when he plays these characters, is thinking of the audience?—No: he who would be great in the eyes of others must first learn to be nothing in his own. The love of fame, as it enters at times into his mind, is only another name for the love of excellence; or it is the ambition to attain the highest excellence, sanctioned by the highest authority—that of time.

Those minds, then, which are the most entitled to expect it, can best put up with the postponement of their claims to lasting

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fame. They can afford to wait. They are not afraid that truth and nature will ever wear out; will lose their gloss with novelty, or their effect with fashion. If their works have the seeds of immortality in them, they will live; if they have not, they care little about them as theirs. They do not complain of the start which others have got of them in the race of everlasting renown, or of the impossibility of attaining the honours which time alone can give, during the term of their natural lives. They know that no applause, however loud and violent, can anticipate or over-rule the judgment of posterity; that the opinion of no one individual, nor of any one generation can have the weight, the authority (to say nothing of the force of sympathy and prejudice,) which must belong to that of successive generations. The brightest living reputation cannot be equally imposing to the imagination with that which is covered and rendered venerable with the hoar of innumerable ages. No modern production can have the same atmosphere of sentiment around it as the remains of classical antiquity. But then our moderns may console themselves with the reflection that they will be old in their turn, and will either be remembered with still increasing honours, or quite forgotten!

I would speak of the living poets as I have spoken of the dead (for I think highly of many of them;) but I cannot speak of them with the same reverence, because I do not feel it; with the same confidence, because I cannot have the same authority to sanction my opinion. I cannot be absolutely certain that anybody, twenty years hence, will think anything about any of them; but we may be pretty sure that Milton and Shakspeare will be remembered twenty years hence. We are, therefore, not without excuse if we husband our enthusiasm a little, and do not prematurely lay out our whole stock in untried ventures, and what may turn out to be false bottoms. I have myself outlived one generation of favourite poets, the Darwins, the Hayleys, the Sewards. Who reads them now?—If, however, I have not the verdict of posterity to bear me out in bestowing the most unqualified praises on their immediate successors, it is also to be remembered that neither does it warrant me in condemning them. Indeed, it was not my wish to go into this

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ungrateful part of the subject; but something of the sort is expected from me, and I must run the gauntlet as well as I can. Another circumstance that adds to the difficulty of doing justice to all parties is that I happen to have had a personal acquaintance with some of these jealous votaries of the Muses; and that is not the likeliest way to imbibe a high opinion of the rest. Poets do not praise one another in the language of hyperbole. I am afraid, therefore, that I labour under a degree of prejudice against some of the most popular poets of the day, from an early habit of deference to the critical opinions of some of the least popular. I cannot say that I ever learnt much about Shakspeare or Milton, Spenser or Chaucer, from these professed guides; for I never heard them say much about them. They were always talking of themselves and one another. Nor am I certain that this sort of personal intercourse with living authors, while it takes away all real relish or freedom of opinion with regard to their contemporaries, greatly enhances our respect for themselves. Poets are not ideal beings; but have their prose-sides, like the commonest of the people. We often hear persons say, What they would have given to have seen Shakspeare! For my part, I would give a great deal not to have seen him; at least, if he was at all like anybody else that I have ever seen. But why should he? for his works are not! This is, doubtless, one great advantage which the dead have over the living. It is always fortunate for ourselves and others, when we are prevented from exchanging admiration for knowledge. The splendid vision that in youth haunts our idea of the poetical character, fades, upon acquaintance, into the light of common day; as the azure tints that deck the mountain's brow are lost on a nearer approach to them. It is well, according to the moral of one of the Lyrical Ballads,—"To leave Yarrow unvisited." But to "leave this face-making," and begin.

I am a great admirer of the female writers of the present day; they appear to me like so many modern muses. I could be in love with Mrs. Inchbald, romantic with Mrs. Radcliffe, and sarcastic with Madame D'Arblay: but they are novel-writers, and, like Audrey, may "thank the gods for not having made them poetical." Did any one here ever read Mrs. Leicester's School?

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If they have not, I wish they would; there will be just time before the next three volumes of the Tales of My Landlord come out. That is not a school of affectation, but of humanity. No one can think too highly of the work, or highly enough of the author.

The first poetess I can recollect is Mrs. Barbauld, with whose works I became acquainted before those of any other author, male or female, when I was learning to spell words of one syllable in her story-books for children. I became acquainted with her poetical works long after in Enfield's Speaker; and remember being much divided in my opinion, at that time, between her Ode to Spring and Collins's Ode to Evening. I wish I could repay my childish debt of gratitude in terms of appropriate praise. She is a very pretty poetess; and, to my fancy, strews the flowers of poetry most agreeably round the borders of religious controversy. She is a neat and pointed prose-writer. Her "Thoughts on the Inconsistency of Human Expectations" is one of the most ingenious and sensible essays in the language. There is the same idea in one of Barrow's Sermons.

Mrs. Hannah More is another celebrated modern poetess, and I believe still living. She has written a great deal which I have never read.

Miss Baillie must make up this trio of female poets. Her tragedies and comedies, one of each to illustrate each of the passions, separately, from the rest, are heresies in the dramatic art. She is a Unitarian in poetry. With her the passions are, like the French republic, one and indivisible: they are not so in nature, or in Shakspeare. Mr. Southey has, I believe, somewhere expressed an opinion that the Basil of Miss Baillie is superior to Romeo and Juliet. I shall not stay to contradict him. On the other hand, I prefer her De Montfort, which was condemned on the stage, to some later tragedies, which have been more fortunate—to the Remorse, Bertram, and lastly, Fazio. There is in the chief character of that play a nerve, a continued unity of interest, a setness of purpose and precision of outline which John Kemble alone was capable of giving; and there is all the grace which women have in writing. In

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saying that De Montfort was a character which just suited Mr. Kemble, I mean to pay a compliment to both. He was not "a man of no mark or likelihood:" and what he could be supposed to do particularly well must have a meaning in it. As to the other tragedies just mentioned, there is no reason why any common actor should not "make mouths in them at the invisible event,"—one as well as another. Having thus expressed my sense of the merits of this authoress, I must add that her comedy of the Election, performed last summer at the Lyceum with indifferent success, appears to me the perfection of baby-house theatricals. Every thing in it has such a *do-me-good* air, is so insipid and amiable. Virtue seems such a pretty playing at make-believe, and vice is such a naughty word. It is a theory of some French author that little girls ought not to be suffered to have dolls to play with, to call them *pretty dears*, to admire their black eyes and cherry cheeks, to lament and bewail over them if they fall down and hurt their faces, to praise them when they are good, and scold them when they are naughty. It is a school of affectation: Miss Baillie has profited of it. She treats her grown men and women as little girls treat their dolls—makes moral puppets of them, pulls the wires, and they talk virtue and act vice, according to their cue and the title prefixed to each comedy or tragedy, not from any real passions of their own, or love either of virtue or vice.

The transition from these to Mr. Rogers's Pleasures of Memory is not far: he is a very lady-like poet. He is an elegant, but feeble writer. He wraps up obvious thoughts in a glittering cover of fine words; is full of enigmas with no meaning to them; is studiously inverted, and scrupulously far-fetched; and his verses are poetry, chiefly because no particle, line, or syllable of them reads like prose. He differs from Milton in this respect, who is accused of having inserted a number of prosaic lines in Paradise Lost. This kind of poetry, which is a more minute and inoffensive species of the Della Cruscan, is like the game of asking what one's thoughts are like. It is a tortuous, tottering, wriggling, fidgetty translation of every thing from the vulgar tongue, into all the tantalizing, teasing, tripping, lisping, *minnmince-pimmince* of the highest brilliancy and fashion of poeti-

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cal diction. You have nothing like truth of nature or simplicity of expression. The fastidious and languid reader is never shocked by meeting, from the rarest chance in the world, with a single homely phrase or intelligible idea. You cannot see the thought for the ambiguity of the language, the figure for the finery, the picture for the varnish. The whole is refined, and frittered away into an appearance of the most evanescent brilliancy and tremulous imbecility.—There is no other fault to be found with the Pleasures of Memory than a want of taste and genius. The sentiments are amiable, and the notes at the end highly interesting, particularly the one relating to the Countess Pillar (as it is called) between Appleby and Penrith, erected (as the inscription tells the thoughtful traveller) by Anne Countess of Pembroke, in the year 1648, in memory of her last parting with her good pious mother in the same place in the year 1616—

> "To shew that power of love, how great
> Beyond all human estimate."

This story is also told in the poem, but with so many artful inuendos and tinsel words that it is hardly intelligible, and still less does it reach the heart.

Campbell's Pleasures of Hope is of the same school, in which a painful attention is paid to the expression in proportion as there is little to express, and the decomposition of prose is substituted for the composition of poetry. How much the sense and keeping in the ideas are sacrificed to a gingle of words and epigrammatic turn of expression, may be seen in such lines as the following:—one of the characters, an old invalid, wishes to end his days under

> "Some hamlet shade, to yield his sickly form
> Health in the breeze, and shelter in the storm."

Now the antithesis here totally fails; for it is the breeze, and not the tree, or, as it is quaintly expressed, *hamlet shade*, that affords health, though it is the tree that affords shelter in or from the storm. Instances of the same sort of *curiosa infelicitas* are not rare in this author. His verses on the Battle of Hohen-

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linden have considerable spirit and animation. His Gertrude of Wyoming is his principal performance. It is a kind of historical paraphrase of Mr. Wordsworth's poem of Ruth. It shows little power, or power enervated by extreme fastidiousness. It is

> ——— "Of outward show
> Elaborate; of inward less exact."

There are painters who trust more to the setting of their pictures than to the truth of the likeness. Mr. Campbell always seems to me to be thinking how his poetry will look when it comes to be hot-pressed on superfine wove paper, to have a disproportionate eye to points and commas, and dread of errors of the press. He is so afraid of doing wrong, of making the smallest mistake, that he does little or nothing. Lest he should wander irretrievably from the right path, he stands still. He writes according to established etiquette. He offers the Muses no violence. If he lights upon a good thought he immediately drops it for fear of spoiling a good thing. When he launches a sentiment that you think will float him triumphantly for once to the bottom of the stanza, he stops short at the end of the first or second line, and stands shivering on the brink of beauty, afraid to trust himself to the fathomless abyss. *Tutus nimium, timidusque procellarum.* His very circumspection betrays him. The poet, as well as the woman, that deliberates, is undone. He is much like a man whose heart fails him just as he is going up in a balloon, and who breaks his neck by flinging himself out of it when it is too late. Mr. Campbell too often maims and mangles his ideas before they are full formed, to form them to the Procrustes' bed of criticism; or strangles his intellectual offspring in the birth, lest they should come to an untimely end in the Edinburgh Review. He plays the hypercritic on himself, and starves his genius to death from a needless apprehension of a plethora. No writer who thinks habitually of the critics, either to tremble at their censures or set them at defiance, can write well. It is the business of reviewers to watch poets, not of poets to watch reviewers. There is one admirable simile in this poem, of the European child brought by the sooty Indian in his

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hand, "like morning brought by night." The love-scenes of Gertrude of Wyoming breathe a balmy voluptuousness of sentiment; but they are generally broken off in the middle; they are like the scent of a bank of violets, faint and rich, which the gale suddenly conveys in a different direction. Mr. Campbell is careful of his own reputation, and economical of the pleasures of his readers. He treats them as the fox in the fable treated his guest the stork; or, to use his own expression, his fine things are

"Like angels' visits, few, and far between." *

There is another fault in this poem, which is the mechanical structure of the fable. The most striking events occur in the shape of antitheses. The story is cut into the form of a parallelogram. There is the same systematic alternation of good and evil, of violence and repose, that there is of light and shade in a picture. The Indian, who is the chief agent in the interest of the poem, vanishes and returns after long intervals, like the periodical revolutions of the planets. He unexpectedly appears just in the nick of time, after years of absence, and without any known reason but the convenience of the author and the astonishment of the reader; as if nature were a machine constructed on a principle of complete contrast, to produce a theatrical effect. *Nec Deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus.* Mr. Campbell's savage never appears but upon great occasions, and then his punctuality is preternatural and alarming. He is the most wonderful instance on record of poetical *reliability*. The most dreadful mischiefs happen at the most mortifying moments; and when your expectations are wound up to the highest pitch, you are sure to have them knocked on the head by a premeditated and remorseless stroke of the poet's pen. This is done so often for the convenience of the author, that in the end it ceases to be for the satisfaction of the reader.

* There is the same idea in Blair's Grave.

"——— Its visits,
Like those of angels, short, and far between."

Mr. Campbell, in altering the expression, has spoiled it. "Few," and "far between," are the same thing.

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Tom Moore is a poet of a quite different stamp. He is as heedless, gay, and prodigal of his poetical wealth, as the other is careful, reserved, and parsimonious. The genius of both is national. Mr. Moore's Muse is another Ariel, as light, as tricksy, as indefatigable, and as humane a spirit. His fancy is forever on the wing, flutters in the gale, glitters in the sun. Every thing lives, moves, and sparkles in his poetry, while over all love waves his purple light. His thoughts are as restless, as many, and as bright, as the insects that people the sun's beam. "So work the honey-bees," extracting liquid sweets from opening buds; so the butterfly expands its wings to the idle air; so the thistle's silver down is wafted over summer seas. An airy voyager on life's stream, his mind inhales the fragrance of a thousand shores, and drinks of endless pleasures under halcyon skies.—Wherever his footsteps tend over the enamelled ground of fairy fiction—

> "Around him the bees in play flutter and cluster,
> And gaudy butterflies frolic around."

The fault of Mr. Moore is an exuberance of involuntary power. His facility of production lessens the effect of, and hangs as a dead weight upon, what he produces. His levity at last oppresses. The infinite delight he takes in such an infinite number of things, creates indifference in minds less susceptible of pleasure than his own. He exhausts attention by being inexhaustible. His variety cloys; his rapidity dazzles and distracts the sight. The graceful ease with which he lends himself to every subject, the genial spirit with which he indulges in every sentiment, prevents him from giving their full force to the masses of things, from connecting them into a whole. He wants intensity, strength, and grandeur. His mind does not brood over the great and permanent; it glances over the surfaces, the first impressions of things, instead of grappling with the deep-rooted prejudices of the mind, its inveterate habits, and that "perilous stuff that weighs upon the heart." His pen, as it is rapid and fanciful, wants momentum and passion. It requires the same principle to make us thoroughly like poetry that makes us like ourselves so well the feeling of continued identity. The im-

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pressions of Mr. Moore's poetry are detached, desultory, and physical. Its gorgeous colours brighten and fade like the rainbow's. Its sweetness evaporates like the effluvia exhaled from beds of flowers! His gay laughing style, which relates to the immediate pleasures of love or wine, is better than his sentimental and romantic vein. His Irish melodies are not free from affectation and a certain sickliness of pretension. His serious descriptions are apt to run into flowery tenderness. His pathos sometimes melts into a mawkish sensibility, or crystallizes into all the prettiness of allegorical language, and glittering hardness of external imagery. But he has wit at will, and of the first quality. His satirical and burlesque poetry is his best: it is first-rate. His Twopenny Post-Bag is a perfect "nest of spicery;" where the Cayenne is not spared. The politician there sharpens the poet's pen. In this, too, our bard resembles the bee—he has its honey and its sting.

Mr. Moore ought not to have written Lalla Rookh, even for three thousand guineas. His fame is worth more than that. He should have minded the advice of Fadladeen. It is not, however, a failure, so much as an evasion and a consequent disappointment of public expectation. He should have left it to others to break conventions with nations, and faith with the world. He should, at any rate, have kept his with the public. Lalla Rookh is not what people wanted to see whether Mr. Moore could do—namely, whether he could write a long epic poem. It is four short tales. The interest, however, is often high-wrought and tragic, but the execution still turns to the effeminate and voluptuous side. Fortitude of mind is the first requisite of a tragic or epic writer. Happiness of nature and felicity of genius are the pre-eminent characteristics of the bard of Erin. If he is not perfectly contented with what he is, all the world beside is. He had no temptation to risk any thing in adding to the love and admiration of his age, and more than one country.

"Therefore to be possessed with double pomp,
To guard a title that was rich before,
To gild refined gold, to paint the lily,
To throw a perfume on the violet,
To smooth the ice, or add another hue

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> Unto the rainbow, or with taper light
> To seek the beauteous eye of heav'n to garnish,
> Is wasteful and ridiculous excess."

The same might be said of Mr. Moore's seeking to bind an epic crown, or the shadow of one, round his other laurels.

If Mr. Moore has not suffered enough personally, Lord Byron (judging from the tone of his writings) might be thought to have suffered too much to be a truly great poet. If Mr. Moore lays himself too open to all the various impulses of things, the outward shows of earth and sky, to every breath that blows, to every stray sentiment that crosses his fancy; Lord Byron shuts himself up too much in the impenetrable gloom of his own thoughts, and buries the natural light of things in "nook monastic." The Giaour, the Corsair, Childe Harold, are all the same person, and they are apparently all himself. The everlasting repetition of one subject, the same dark ground of fiction, with the darker colours of the poet's mind spread over it, the unceasing accumulation of horrors on horror's head, steels the mind against the sense of pain as inevitably as the unwearied Siren sounds and luxurious monotony of Mr. Moore's poetry make it inaccessible to pleasure.

Lord Byron's poetry is as morbid as Mr. Moore's is careless and dissipated. He has more depth of passion, more force and impetuosity, but the passion is always of the same unaccountable character, at once violent and sullen, fierce and gloomy. It is not the passion of a mind struggling with misfortune, or the hopelessness of its desires, but of a mind preying upon itself, and disgusted with, or indifferent to, all other things. There is nothing less poetical than this sort of unaccommodating selfishness. There is nothing more repulsive than this sort of ideal absorption of all the interests of others, of the good and ills of life, in the ruling passion and moody abstraction of a single mind, as if it would make itself the centre of the universe, and there was nothing worth cherishing but its intellectual diseases. It is like a cancer, eating into the heart of poetry. But still there is power: and power rivets attention and forces admiration. "He hath a demon:" and that is the next thing to being full of the God. His brow collects the

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scattered gloom: his eye flashes livid fire that withers and consumes. But still we watch the progress of the scathing bolt with interest, and mark the ruin it leaves behind with awe. Within the contracted range of his imagination, he has great unity and truth of keeping. He chooses elements and agents congenial to his mind, the dark and glittering ocean, the frail bark hurrying before the storm, pirates and men that "house on the wild sea with wild usages." He gives the tumultuous eagerness of action, and the fixed despair of thought. In vigour of style and force of conception, he in one sense surpasses every writer of the present day. His indignant apophthegms are like oracles of misanthropy. He who wishes for "a curse to kill with," may find it in Lord Byron's writings. Yet he has beauty lurking underneath his strength, tenderness sometimes joined with the phrenzy of despair. A flash of golden light sometimes follows from a stroke of his pencil, like a falling meteor. The flowers that adorn his poetry bloom over charnel-houses and the grave!

There is one subject on which Lord Byron is fond of writing, on which I wish he would not write—Bonaparte. Not that I quarrel with his writing for him, or against him, but with his writing both for him and against him. What right has he to do this? Bonaparte's character, be it what else it may, does not change every hour according to his Lordship's varying humour. He is not a pipe for Fortune's finger, or for his Lordship's Muse, to play what stop she pleases on. Why should Lord Byron now laud him to the skies in the hour of success, and then peevishly wreak his disappointment on the god of his idolatry? The man he writes of does not rise or fall with circumstances: but "looks on tempests and is never shaken" Besides, he is a subject for history, and not for poetry.

"Great princes' favourites their fair leaves spread,
But as the marigold at the sun's eye,
And in themselves their pride lies buried;
For at a frown they in their glory die.
The painful warrior, famoused for fight,
After a thousand victories once foil'd,
Is from the book of honour razed quite,
And all the rest forgot for which he toil'd."

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If Lord Byron will write anything more on this hazardous theme, let him take these lines of Shakspeare for his guide, and finish them in the spirit of the original—they will then be worthy of the subject.

Walter Scott is the most popular of all the poets of the present day, and deservedly so. He describes that which is most easily and generally understood with more vivacity and effect than anybody else. He has no excellences, either of a lofty or recondite kind, which lie beyond the reach of the most ordinary capacity to find out; but he has all the good qualities which all the world agree to understand. His style is clear, flowing, and transparent: his sentiments, of which his style is an easy and natural medium, are common to him with his readers. He has none of Mr. Wordsworth's *idiosyncracy*. He differs from his readers only in a greater range of knowledge and facility of expression. His poetry belongs to the class of *improvisatori* poetry. It has neither depth, height, nor breadth in it; neither uncommon strength, nor uncommon refinement of thought, sentiment, or language. It has no originality. But if this author has no research, no moving power in his own breast, he relies with the greater safety and success on the force of his subject. He selects a story such as is sure to please, full of incidents, characters, peculiar manners, costume, and scenery; and he tells it in a way that can offend no one. He never wearies or disappoints you. He is communicative and garrulous; but he is not his own hero. He never obtrudes himself on your notice to prevent your seeing the subject. What passes in the poem passes much as it would have done in reality. The author has little or nothing to do with it. Mr. Scott has great intuitive power of fancy, great vividness of pencil in placing external objects and events before the eye. The force of his mind is picturesque, rather than *moral*. He gives more of the features of nature than the soul of passion. He conveys the distinct outlines and visible changes in outward objects, rather than "their mortal consequences." He is very inferior to Lord Byron in intense passion, to Moore in delightful fancy, to Mr. Wordsworth in profound sentiment: but he has more picturesque power than any of them; that is, he places the objects themselves, about

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which *they* might feel and think, in a much more striking point of view, with greater variety of dress and attitude, and with more local truth of colouring. His imagery is Gothic and grotesque. The manners and actions have the interest and curiosity belonging to a wild country and a distant period of time. Few descriptions have a more complete reality, a more striking appearance of life and motion, than that of the warriors in the Lady of the Lake, who start up at the command of Roderick Dhu, from their concealment under the fern, and disappear again in an instant. The Lay of the Last Minstrel and Marmion are the first, and perhaps the best, of his works. The Goblin Page, in the first of these, is a very interesting and inscrutable little personage. In reading these poems, I confess I am a little disconcerted, in turning over the page, to find Mr. Westall's pictures, which always seem *fac-similes* of the persons represented, with ancient costume and a theatrical air. This may be a compliment to Mr. Westall, but it is not one to Walter Scott. The truth is, there is a modern air in the midst of the antiquarian research of Mr. Scott's poetry. It is history or tradition in masquerade. Not only the crust of old words and images is worn off with time,—the substance is grown comparatively light and worthless. The forms are old and uncouth; but the spirit is effeminate and frivolous. This is a deduction from the praise I have given to his pencil for extreme fidelity, though it has been no obstacle to its drawing-room success. He has just hit the town between the romantic and the fashionable; and, between the two, secured all classes of readers on his side. In a word, I conceive that he is to the great poet what an excellent mimic is to a great actor. There is no determinate impression left on the mind by reading his poetry. It has no results. The reader rises up from the perusal with new images and associations, but he remains the same man that he was before. A great mind is one that moulds the minds of others. Mr. Scott has put the Border Minstrelsy and scattered traditions of the country into easy, animated verse. But the Notes to his poems are just as entertaining as the poems themselves, and his poems are only entertaining.

Mr. Wordsworth is the most original poet now living. He

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is the reverse of Walter Scott in his defects and excellences. He has nearly all that the other wants, and wants all that the other possesses. His poetry is not external, but internal; it does not depend upon tradition, or story, or old song; he furnishes it from his own mind, and is his own subject. He is the poet of mere sentiment. Of many of the Lyrical Ballads, it is not possible to speak in terms of too high praise, such as Hartleap Well, the Banks of the Wye, Poor Susan, parts of the Leech-gatherer, the lines to a Cuckoo, to a Daisy, the Complaint, several of the Sonnets, and a hundred others of inconceivable beauty, of perfect originality and pathos. They open a finer and deeper vein of thought and feeling than any poet in modern times has done, or attempted. He has produced a deeper impression, and on a smaller circle, than any other of his contemporaries. His powers have been mistaken by the age, nor does he exactly understand them himself. He cannot form a whole. He has not the constructive faculty. He can give only the fine tones of thought, drawn from his mind by accident or nature, like the sounds drawn from the Æolian harp by the wandering gale.—He is totally deficient in all the machinery of poetry. His *Excursion*, taken as a whole, notwithstanding the noble materials thrown away in it, is a proof this. The line labours, the sentiment moves slow, but the poem stands stock-still. The reader makes no way from the first line to the last. It is more than anything in the world like Robinson Crusoe's boat, which would have been an excellent good boat, and would have carried him to the other side of the globe, but that he could not get it out of the sand where it stuck fast. I did what little I could to help to launch it at the time, but it would not do. I am not, however, one of those who laugh at the attempts or failures of men of genius. It is not my way to cry "Long life to the conqueror." Success and desert are not with me synonymous terms; and the less Mr. Wordsworth's general merits have been understood, the more necessary is it to insist upon them. This is not the place to repeat what I have already said on the subject. The reader may turn to it in the Round Table.* I do not think, however, there is anything in

* The criticism referred to will be found in the Appendix.

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the larger poem equal to many of the detached pieces in the Lyrical Ballads. As Mr. Wordsworth's poems have been little known to the public, or chiefly through garbled extracts from them, I will here give an entire poem (one that has always been a favourite with me,) that the reader may know what it is that the admirers of this author find to be delighted with in his poetry. Those who do not feel the beauty and the force of it may save themselves the trouble of inquiring farther.

HART-LEAP WELL.

"The knight had ridden down from Wensley moor
With the slow motion of a summer's cloud;
He turned aside towards a vassal's door,
And, 'Bring another horse!' he cried aloud.

Another horse!'—That shout the vassal heard,
And saddled his best steed, a comely gray;
Sir Walter mounted him; he was the third
Which he had mounted on that glorious day.

Joy sparkled in the prancing courser's eyes;
The horse and horseman are a happy pair;
But, though Sir Walter like a falcon flies,
There is a doleful silence in the air.

A rout this morning left Sir Walter's hall,
That as they galloped made the echoes roar;
But horse and man are vanished, one and all;
Such race, I think, was never seen before.

Sir Walter, restless as a veering wind,
Calls to the few tired dogs that yet remain:
Brach, Swift, and Music, noblest of their kind,
Follow, and up the weary mountain strain.

The knight hallooed, he chid and cheered them on
With suppliant gestures and upbraidings stern;
But breath and eye-sight fail; and, one by one,
The dogs are stretched among the mountain fern.

Where is the throng, the tumult of the race?
The bugles that so joyfully were blown?
—This chase it looks not like an earthly chase;
Sir Walter and the hart are left alone.

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The poor hart toils along the mountain side;
I will not stop to tell how far he fled,
Nor will I mention by what death he died;
But now the knight beholds him lying dead.

Dismounting then, he leaned against a thorn;
He had no follower, dog, nor man, nor boy:
He neither smacked his whip nor blew his horn,
But gazed upon the spoil with silent joy.

Close to the thorn on which Sir Walter leaned,
Stood his dumb partner in this glorious act;
Weak as a lamb the hour that it is yeaned;
And foaming like a mountain cataract.

Upon his side the hart was lying stretched:
His nose half-touched a spring beneath a hill,
And with the last deep groan his breath had fetched
The waters of the spring were trembling still.

And now, too happy for repose or rest,
(Was never man in such a joyful case!)
Sir Walter walked all round, north, south, and west,
And gazed, and gazed upon that darling place.

And climbing up the hill—(it was at least,
Nine roods of sheer ascent) Sir Walter found,
Three several hoof-marks which the hunted beast
Had left imprinted on the verdant ground.

Sir Walter wiped his face and cried, 'Till now
Such sight was never seen by living eyes:
Three leaps have borne him from this lofty brow,
Down to the very fountain where he lies.

I'll build a pleasure-house upon this spot,
And a small arbour, made for rural joy;
'Twill be the traveller's shed, the pilgrim's cot,
A place of love for damsels that are coy.

A cunning artist will I have to frame
A basin for that fountain in the dell;
And they, who do make mention of the same
From this day forth, shall call it HART-LEAP WELL.

And, gallant brute! to make thy praises known,
Another monument shall here be raised;
Three several pillars, each a rough-hewn stone,
And planted where thy hoofs the turf have grazed.

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And, in the summer-time when days are long,
I will come hither with my paramour;
And with the dancers, and the minstrel's song,
We will make merry in that pleasant bower.

Till the foundations of the mountains fail,
My mansion with its arbour shall endure;—
The joy of them who till the fields of Swale,
And them who dwell among the woods of Ure!'

Then home he went, and left the hart, stone dead,
With breathless nostrils stretched above the spring,
—Soon did the knight perform what he had said,
And far and wide the fame thereof did ring.

Ere thrice the moon into her port had steered,
A cup of stone received the living well;
Three pillars of rude stone Sir Walter reared,
And built a house of pleasure in the dell.

And near the fountain, flowers of stature tall
With trailing plants and trees were intertwined,—
Which soon composed a little sylvan hall,
A leafy shelter from the sun and wind.

And thither, when the summer-days were long,
Sir Walter journeyed with his paramour;
And with the dancers and the minstrel's song
Made merriment within that pleasant bower.

The knight, Sir Walter, died in course of time,
And his bones lie in his paternal vale.—
But there is matter for a second rhyme,
And I to this would add another tale."

PART SECOND.

"The moving accident is not my trade:
To freeze the blood I have no ready arts:
'Tis my delight, alone in summer shade,
To pipe a simple song for thinking hearts.

As I from Hawes to Richmond did repair,
It chanced that I saw standing in a dell
Three aspens at three corners of a square,
And one, not four yards distant, near a well.

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What this imported I could ill divine:
And, pulling now the rein my horse to stop,
I saw three pillars standing in a line,
The last stone pillar on a dark hill-top.

The trees were gray, with neither arms nor head;
Half-wasted the square mound of tawny green;
So that you just might say, as then I said,
'Here in old time the hand of man hath been.'

I looked upon the hill both far and near,
More doleful place did never eye survey;
It seemed as if the spring-time came not here,
And Nature here were willing to decay.

I stood in various thoughts and fancies lost,
When one, who was in shepherd's garb attired,
Came up the hollow:—Him did I accost,
And what this place might be I then inquired.

The shepherd stopped, and that same story told
Which in my former rhyme I have rehearsed.
'A jolly place,' said he, 'in times of old!
But something ails it now; the spot is curst.

You see these lifeless stumps of aspen wood—
Some say that they are beeches, others elms—
These were the bower; and here a mansion stood,
The finest palace of a hundred realms!

The arbour does its own condition tell;
You see the stones, the fountain, and the stream;
But as to the great lodge! you might as well
Hunt half a day for a forgotten dream.

There's neither dog nor heifer, horse nor sheep,
Will wet his lips within that cup of stone;
And oftentimes, when all are fast asleep,
This water doth send forth a dolorous groan.

Some say that here a murder has been done,
And blood cries out for blood: but, for my part,
I've guessed, when I've been sitting in the sun,
That it was all for that unhappy hart.

What thoughts must through the creature's brain have passed!
Even from the topmost stone, upon the steep,
Are but three bounds—and look, Sir, at this last—
O Master! it has been a cruel leap.

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For thirteen hours he ran a desperate race;
And in my simple mind we cannot tell
What cause the hart might have to love this place,
And come and make his death-bed near the well.

Here on the grass perhaps asleep he sank,
Lulled by this fountain in the summer-tide;
This water was perhaps the first he drank
When he had wandered from his mother's side.

In April here beneath the scented thorn
He heard the birds their morning carols sing;
And he, perhaps, for aught we know, was born
Not half a furlong from that self-same spring.

But now here's neither grass nor pleasant shade;
The sun on drearier hollow never shone;
So will it be, as I have often said,
Till trees, and stones, and fountain all are gone.'

'Gray-headed Shepherd, thou hast spoken well;
Small difference lies between thy creed and mine:
This beast not unobserved by Nature fell;
His death was mourned by sympathy divine.

The Being that is in the clouds and air,
That is in the green leaves among the groves,
Maintains a deep and reverential care
For the unoffending creatures whom he loves.

The pleasure-house is dust:—behind, before,
This is no common waste, no common gloom;
But Nature, in due course of time, once more
Shall here put on her beauty and her bloom.

She leaves the objects to a slow decay,
That what we are, and have been, may be known;
But, at the coming of the milder day,
These monuments shall all be overgrown.

One lesson, Shepherd, let us two divide,
Taught both by what she shows, and what conceals,
Never to blend our pleasure or our pride
With sorrow of the meanest thing that feels.'"

Mr. Wordsworth is at the head of that which has been denominated the Lake school of poetry; a school which, with all my respect for it, I do not think sacred from criticism or exempt

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from faults, of some of which faults I shall speak with becoming frankness; for I do not see that the liberty of the press ought to be shackled, or freedom of speech curtailed, to screen either its revolutionary or renegado extravagances. This school of poetry had its origin in the French revolution, or rather in those sentiments and opinions which produced that revolution; and which sentiments and opinions were indirectly imported into this country in translations from the German about that period. Our poetical literature had, towards the close of the last century, degenerated into the most trite, insipid, and mechanical of all things, in the hands of the followers of Pope and the old French school of poetry. It wanted something to stir it up, and it found that something in the principles and events of the French revolution. From the impulse it thus received, it rose at once from the most servile imitation and tamest common-place to the utmost pitch of singularity and paradox. The change in the belles-lettres was as complete, and to many persons as startling, as the change in politics with which it went hand in hand. There was a mighty ferment in the heads of statesmen and poets, kings and people.—According to the prevailing notions, all was to be natural and new. Nothing that was established was to be tolerated. All the common-place figures of poetry, tropes, allegories, personifications, with the whole heathen mythology, were instantly discarded; a classical allusion was considered as a piece of antiquated foppery; capital letters were no more allowed in print than letters-patent of nobility were permitted in real life; kings and queens were dethroned from their rank and station in legitimate tragedy or epic poetry, as they were decapitated elsewhere; rhyme was looked upon as a relic of the feudal system, and regular metre was abolished along with regular government.—Authority and fashion, elegance or arrangement, were hooted out of countenance, as pedantry and prejudice. Every one did that which was good in his own eyes. The object was to reduce all things to an absolute level; and a singularly affected and outrageous simplicity prevailed in dress and manners, in style and sentiment. A striking effect produced where it was least expected, something new and original, no matter whether good, bad, or indifferent, whether mean or lofty, ex-

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travagant or childish, was all that was aimed at, or considered as compatible with sound philosophy and an age of reason. The licentiousness grew extreme: Coryate's Crudities were nothing to it. The world was to be turned topsy-turvy; and poetry, by the good will of our Adam-wits, was to share its fate, and begin *de novo*. It was a time of promise, a renewal of the world and of letters; and the Deucalions, who were to perform this feat of regeneration, were the present poet-laureat and the two authors of the Lyrical Ballads. The Germans, who made heroes of robbers, and honest women of cast-off mistresses, had already exhausted the extravagant and marvellous in sentiment and situation; our native writers adopted a wonderful simplicity of style and matter. The paradox they set out with was, that all things are by nature equally fit subjects for poetry; or that, if there is any preference to be given, those that are the meanest and most unpromising are the best, as they leave the greatest scope for the unbounded stores of thought and fancy in the writer's own mind. Poetry had with them "neither buttress nor coigne of vantage to make its pendant bed and procreant cradle." It was not "born so high: its aiery buildeth in the cedar's top, and dallies with the wind, and scorns the sun." It grew like a mushroom out of the ground; or was hidden in it like a truffle, which it required a particular sagacity and industry to find out and dig up. They founded the new school on a principle of sheer humanity, on pure nature void of art. It could not be said of these sweeping reformers and dictators in the republic of letters, that "in their train walked crowns and crownets; that realms and islands, like plates, dropt from their pockets:" but they were surrounded, in company with the Muses, by a mixed rabble of idle apprentices and Botany Bay convicts, female vagrants, gipsies, meek daughters in the family of Christ, of idiot boys and mad mothers, and after them "owls and night-ravens flew."—They scorned "degrees, priority, and place, insisture, course, proportion, season, form, office, and custom, in all line of order:"—the distinctions of birth, the vicissitudes of fortune, did not enter into their abstracted, lofty, and levelling calculation of human nature. He who was more than man with them was none. They claimed kindred only with

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the commonest of the people: peasants, pedlers, and village-barbers were their oracles and bosom friends. Their poetry, in the extreme to which it professedly tended, and was in effect carried, levels all distinctions of nature and society; has "no figures nor no fantasies," which the prejudices of superstition or the customs of the world draw in the brains of men; "no trivial fond records" of all that has existed in the history of past ages; it has no adventitious pride, pomp, or circumstance, to set it off; "the marshal's truncheon, nor the judge's robe;" neither tradition, reverence, nor ceremony, "that to great ones 'longs:" it breaks in pieces the golden images of poetry, and defaces its armorial bearings, to melt them down in the mould of common humanity or of its own upstart self-sufficiency. They took the same method in their new-fangled "metre ballad-mongering" scheme, which Rousseau did in his prose paradoxes—of exciting attention by reversing the established standards of opinion and estimation in the world. They were for bringing poetry back to its primitive simplicity and state of nature, as he was for bringing society back to the savage state: so that the only thing remarkable left in the world by this change would be the persons who had produced it. A thorough adept in this school of poetry and philanthropy is jealous of all excellence but his own. He does not even like to share his reputation with his subject; for he would have it all to proceed from his own power and originality of mind. Such a one is slow to admire anything that is admirable; feels no interest in what is most interesting to others, no grandeur in any thing grand, no beauty in any thing beautiful. He tolerates only what he himself creates; he sympathizes only with what can enter into no competition with him, with "the bare trees and mountains bare, and grass in the green field." He sees nothing but himself and the universe. He hates all greatness and all pretensions to it, whether well or ill founded. His egotism is in some respects a madness; for he scorns even the admiration of himself, thinking it a presumption in any one to suppose that he has taste or sense enough to understand him. He hates all science and all art; he hates chemistry, he hates conchology; he hates Voltaire; he hates Sir Isaac Newton; he hates wisdom; he hates wit; he hates meta-

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physics, which, he says, are unintelligible, and yet he would be thought to understand them; he hates prose; he hates al poetry but his own; he hates the dialogues in Shakspeare; he hates music, dancing, and painting; he hates Rubens, he hates Rembrandt; he hates Raphael, he hates Titian; he hates Vandyke; he hates the antiqué; he hates the Apollo Belvidere; he hates the Venus of Medicis. This is the reason that so few people take an interest in his writings, because he takes an interest in nothing that others do!—The effect has been perceived as something odd; but the cause or principle has never been distinctly traced to its source before, as far as I know. The proofs are to be found every where—in Mr. Southey's Botany Bay Eclogues, in his book of Songs and Sonnets, his Odes and Inscriptions, so well parodied in the Anti-Jacobin Review, in his Joan of Arc, and last, though not least, in his Wat Tyler:

> "When Adam delved, and Eve span,
> Where was then the gentleman?"—

(or the poet laureat either, we may ask?)—in Mr. Coleridge's Ode to an Ass's Foal, in his lines to Sarah, his Religious Musings; and in his and Mr. Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads, *passim*.

Of Mr. Southey's larger epics, I have but a faint recollection at this distance of time, but all that I remember of them is mechanical and extravagant, heavy and superficial. His affected, disjointed style is well imitated in the Rejected Addresses. The difference between him and Sir Richard Blackmore seems to be that the one is heavy and the other light, the one solemn and the other pragmatical, the one phlegmatic and the other flippant; and that there is no Gay in the present time to give a Catalogue Raisonné of the performances of the living undertaker of epics. Kehama is a loose sprawling figure, such as we see cut out of wood or paper, and pulled or jerked with wire or thread, to make sudden and surprising motions, without meaning, grace, or nature in them. By far the best of his works are some of his shorter personal compositions, in which there is an ironical mixture of the quaint and serious, such as his lines on a picture of Gaspar Poussin, the fine tale of Gualberto, his Description of a Pig, and the Holly-tree, which is an

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affecting, beautiful, and modest retrospect on his own character. May the aspiration with which it concludes be fulfilled! *—

* "O reader! hast thou ever stood to see
The Holly Tree?
The eye that contemplates it well perceives
Its glossy leaves,
Ordered by an intelligence so wise
As might confound the Atheist's sophistries.

Below, a circling fence, its leaves are seen
Wrinkled and keen;
No grazing cattle through their prickly round
Can reach to wound;
But as they grow where nothing is to fear,
Smooth and unarm'd the pointless leaves appear.

I love to view these things with curious eyes,
And moralize;
And in the wisdom of the Holly Tree
Can emblems see
Wherewith perchance to make a pleasant rhyme,
Such as may profit in the after time.

So, though abroad perchance I might appear
Harsh and austere,
To those who on my leisure would intrude
Reserved and rude,
Gentle at home amid my friends I'd be,
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.

And should my youth, as youth is apt, I know,
Some harshness show,
All vain asperities I day by day
Would wear away,
Till the smooth temper of my age should be
Like the high leaves upon the Holly Tree.

And as when all the summer trees are seen
So bright and green,
The Holly leaves their fadeless hues display
Less bright than they,
But when the bare and wintry woods we see,
What then so cheerful as the Holly Tree?

So serious should my youth appear among
The thoughtless throng,
So would I seem amid the young and gay
More grave than they,
That in my age as cheerful I might be
As the green winter of the Holly Tree."—

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But the little he has done of true and sterling excellence is overloaded by the quantity of indifferent matter which he turns out every year, "prosing or versing," with equally mechanical and irresistible facility. His Essays, or political and moral disquisitions, are *not* so full of original matter as Montaigne's. They are second or third rate compositions in that class.

It remains that I should say a few words of Mr. Coleridge; and there is no one who has a better right to say what he thinks of him than I have. "Is there here any dear friend of Cæsar? To him I say, that Brutus's love to Cæsar was no less than his." But no matter.—His Ancient Mariner is his most remarkable performance, and the only one that I could point out to any one as giving an adequate idea of his great natural powers. It is high German, however, and in it he seems to "conceive of poetry but as a drunken dream, reckless, careless, and heedless, of past, present, and to come." His tragedies (for he has written two) are not answerable to it; they are, except a few poetical passages, drawling sentiment and metaphysical jargon. He has no genuine dramatic talent. There is one fine passage in his Christabel, that which contains the description of the quarrel between Sir Leoline and Sir Roland de Vaux of Tryermaine, who had been friends in youth.

"Alas! they had been friends in youth,
But whispering tongues can poison truth;
And constancy lives in realms above!
And life is thorny! and youth is vain;
And to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain:
And thus it chanc'd as I divine,
With Roland and Sir Leoline.

Each speak words of high disdain
And insult to his heart's best brother,
And parted ne'er to meet again!
But neither ever found another
To free the hollow heart from paining—

They stood aloof, the scars remaining,
Like cliffs which had been rent asunder:
A dreary sea now flows between,
But neither heat, nor frost, nor thunder,

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Shall wholly do away I ween
The marks of that which once hath been.

Sir Leoline a moment's space
Stood gazing on the damsel's face;
And the youthful lord of Tryermaine
Came back upon his heart again."

It might seem insidious if I were to praise his ode entitled Fire, Famine, and Slaughter, as an effusion of high poetical enthusiasm, and strong political feeling. His Sonnet to Schiller conveys a fine compliment to the author of the Robbers, and an equally fine idea of the state of youthful enthusiasm in which he composed it.

"Schiller! that hour I would have wish'd to die,
If through the shudd'ring midnight I had sent
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent,
That fearful voice, a famish'd father's cry—

That in no after moment aught less vast
Might stamp me mortal! A triumphant shout
Black Horror scream'd, and all her goblin rout
From the more with'ring scene diminish'd pass'd.

Ah! Bard tremendous in sublimity!
Could I behold thee in thy loftier mood,
Wand'ring at eve, with finely frenzied eye,
Beneath some vast old tempest-swinging wood!
Awhile, with mute awe gazing, I would brood,
Then weep aloud in a wild ecstasy!"—

His *Conciones ad Populum*, Watchman, &c. are dreary trash. Of his Friend, I have spoken the truth elsewhere. But I may say of him here, that he is the only person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius. He is the only person from whom I ever learnt anything. There is only one thing he could learn from me in return, but *that* he has not. He was the first poet I ever knew. His genius at that time had angelic wings, and fed on manna. He talked on for ever; and you wished him to talk on for ever. His thoughts did not seem to come with labour and effort; but as if borne on the gusts of genius, and as if the wings of his imagination lifted him from off his feet. His voice rolled on the ear like the pealing

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organ, and its sound alone was the music of thought. His mind was clothed with wings; and raised on them, he lifted philosophy to heaven. In his descriptions, you then saw the progress of human happiness and liberty in bright and never-ending succession, like the steps of Jacob's ladder, with airy shapes ascending and descending, and with the voice of God at the top of the ladder. And shall I, who heard him then, listen to him now? Not I! That spell is broke; that time is gone forever; that voice is heard no more: but still the recollection comes rushing by with thoughts of long-past years, and rings in my ears with never-dying sound.

"What though the radiance which was once so bright,
Be now forever vanish'd from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flow'r;
I do not grieve, but rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy,
Which having been, must ever be;
In the soothing thoughts that spring
Out of human suffering;
In years that bring the philosophic mind!"—

I have thus gone through the task I intended, and have come at last to the level ground. I have felt my subject gradually sinking from under me as I advanced, and have been afraid of ending in nothing. The interest has unavoidably decreased at almost every successive step of the progress, like a play that has its catastrophe in the first or second act. This, however, I could not help. I have done as well as I could.

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APPENDIX.

I.

ON MILTON'S LYCIDAS.

"At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:
To-morrow to fresh woods and pastures new."

Of all Milton's smaller poems, *Lycidas* is the greatest favourite with me. I cannot agree to the charge which Dr. Johnson has brought against it of pedantry and want of feeling. It is the fine emanation of classical sentiment in a youthful scholar—"most musical, most melancholy." A certain tender gloom overspreads it, a wayward abstraction, a forgetfulness of his subject in the serious reflections that arise out of it. The gusts of passion come and go like the sounds of music borne on the wind. The loss of the friend whose death he laments seem to have recalled, with double force, the reality of those speculations which they had indulged together; we are transported to classic ground, and a mysterious strain steals responsive on the ear, while we listen to the poet,

"With eager thought warbling his Doric lay."

I shall proceed to give a few passages at length in support of my opinion. The first I shall quote is as remarkable for the truth and sweetness of the natural descriptions as for the characteristic elegance of the allusions.

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——— "Together both, ere the high lawn appear'd
Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
We drove a-field; and both together heard
What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft still the star that rose at evening bright
Towards Heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel.
Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,
Temper'd to the oaten flute:
Rough satyrs danced, and fauns with cloven heel
From the glad sound would not be absent long,
And old Dametas loved to hear our song.
But oh! the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!
Thee, shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves
With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn.
The willows and the hazel copses green
Shall now no more be seen
Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the canker to the rose,
Or taint-worn to the weanling herds that graze,
Or frost to flowers that their gay wardrobe wear
When first the white-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd's ear!"

After the fine apostrophe on Fame which Phœbus is invoked to utter, the poet proceeds:—

"Oh fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd flood,
Smooth sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood;
But now my oat proceeds,
And listens to the herald of the sea
That came in Neptune's plea.
He ask'd the waves, and ask'd the felon winds,
What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?
And question'd every gust of rugged winds
That blows from off each beaked promontory.
They knew not of his story:
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd,
The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd."

If this is art, it is perfect art; nor do we wish for anything

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better. The measure of the verse, the very sound of the names, would almost produce the effect here described. To ask the poet not to make use of such allusions as these is to ask the painter not to dip in the colours of the rainbow, if he could.—In fact, it is the common cant of criticism to consider every allusion to the classics, and particularly in a mind like Milton's, as pedantry and affectation. Habit is a second nature; and, in this sense, the pedantry (if it is to be so called) of the scholastic enthusiast, who is constantly referring to images of which his mind is full, is as graceful as it is natural. It is not affectation in him to recur to ideas and modes of expression with which he has the strongest associations, and in which he takes the greatest delight. Milton was as conversant with the world of genius before him as with the world of nature about him; the fables of the ancient mythology were as familiar to him as his dreams. To be a pedant is to see neither the beauties of nature nor of art. Milton saw both; and he made use of the one only to adorn and give new interest to the other. He was a passionate admirer of nature; and, in a single couplet of his, describing the moon,—

> "Like one that had been led astray
> Through the heaven's wide pathless way,"—

there is more intense observation, and intense feeling of nature (as if he had gazed himself blind in looking at her,) than in twenty volumes of descriptive poetry. But he added in his own observation of nature the splendid fictions of ancient genius, enshrined her in the mysteries of ancient religion, and celebrated her with the pomp of ancient names.

> "Next Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow,
> His mantle airy, and his bonnet sedge,
> Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
> Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.
> Oh! who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?
> Last came and last did go,
> The pilot of the Galilean lake."—

There is a wonderful correspondence in the rhythm of these lines to the ideas which they convey. This passage, which

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alludes to the clerical character of *Lycidas*, has been found fault with, as combining the truths of the Christian religion with the fiction of the Heathen mythology. I conceive there is very little foundation for this objection, either in reason or good taste. I will not go so far as to defend Camoens, who, in his *Lusiad*, makes Jupiter send Mercury with a dream to propagate the Catholic religion; nor do I know that it is generally proper to introduce the two things in the same poem, though I see no objection to it here; but of this I am quite sure, that there is no inconsistency or natural repugnance between this poetical and religious faith in the same mind. To the understanding, the belief of the one is incompatible with that of the other; but, in the imagination, they not only may, but do constantly, co-exist. I will venture to go farther, and maintain that every classical scholar, however orthodox a Christian he may be, is an honest Heathen at heart. This requires explanation.—Whoever, then, attaches a reality to any idea beyond the mere name, has, to a certain extent (though not an abstract,) an habitual and practical belief in it. Now, to any one familiar with the names of the personages of the Heathen mythology, they convey a positive identity beyond the mere name. We refer them to something out of ourselves. It is only by an effort of abstraction that we divest ourselves of the idea of their reality; all our involuntary prejudices are on their side. This is enough for the poet. They impose on the imagination by all the attractions of beauty and grandeur. They come down to us in sculpture and in song. We have the same associations with them as if they had really been: for the belief of the fiction in ancient times has produced all the same effect as the reality could have done. It was a reality to the minds of the ancient Greeks and Romans, and through them it is reflected to us. And, as we shape towers, and men, and armed steeds, out of the broken clouds that glitter in the distant horizon, so, throned above the ruins of the ancient world, Jupiter still nods sublime on the top of blue Olympus, Hercules leans upon his club, Apollo has not laid aside his bow, nor Neptune his trident; the sea-gods ride upon the sounding waves, the long procession of heroes and demi-gods passes in endless review before us, and still we hear

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"The muses in a ring
Aye round about Jove's altar sing:
. . . . . .
Have sight of Proteus coming from the sea,
And hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn."

If all these mighty fictions had really existed, they could have done no more for us!—I shall only give one other passage from *Lycidas*, but I flatter myself that it will be a treat to my readers, if they are not already familiar with it. It is the passage which contains that exquisite description of the flowers:

"Return, Alpheus; the dread voice is past
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,
And call the vales, and bid them hither cast
Their bells and flow'rets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
Of shades and wanton winds and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart-star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honeyed showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers;
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk-rose, and the well-attired woodbine,
With cowslips wan, that hang the pensive head,
And every flower, that sad embroidery wears;
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed.
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureat herse where Lycid lies.
For so to interpose a little cause,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
Ah me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding seas
Waft far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd,
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
Or whether thou to our moist vows denied,
Sleep'st by the fables of Bellerus old,
Where the great vision of the guarded mount
Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold
Look homeward, Angel, now, and melt with ruth,
And, O ye Dolphins, waft the hapless youth."

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Dr. Johnson is very much offended at the introduction of these Dolphins; and indeed, if he had had to guide them through the waves, he would have made much the same figure as his old friend Dr. Burney does, swimming in the *Thames* with his wig on, with the water-nymphs, in the picture of Barry, at the Adelphi.

There is a description of flowers in the *Winter's Tale*, which I shall give as a parallel to Milton's. I shall leave my readers to decide which is the finest; for I dare not give the preference. *Perdita* says,—

"Here's flowers for you,
Hot lavender, mints, savoury, marjoram,
The marygold that goes to bed with the sun,
And with him rises, weeping; these are flowers
Of middle summer, and I think they are given
To men of middle age. Y' are welcome.
"*Camillo.* I should leave grazing, were I of your flock,
And only live by gazing.
"*Perdita.* Out, alas!
You'd be so lean that blasts of January
Would blow you through and through. Now, my fairest friends,
I would I had some flowers o' th' spring, that might
Become your time of day. O Proserpina,
For the flowers now that, frighted, you let fall
From Dis's wagon! daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes,
Or Cytherea's breath; pale primroses,
That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phœbus in his strength, a malady
Most incident to maids; bold oxlips, and
The crown imperial; lilies of all kinds,
The flower de lis being one. O these I lack
To make you garlands of, and my sweet friend
To strew him o'er and o'er."

Dr. Johnson's general remark, that Milton's genius had not room to shew itself in his smaller pieces, is not well-founded. Not to mention *Lycidas*, the *Allegro*, and *Penseroso*, it proceeds on a false estimate of the merits of his great work, which is not more distinguished by strength and sublimity than by tender-

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ness and beauty.—The last were as essential qualities of Milton's mind as the first. The battle of the angels, which has been commonly considered as the best part of the *Paradise Lost*, is the worst.

II.

ON THE CHARACTER OF MILTON'S EVE.

THE difference between the character of *Eve* in Milton, and Shakspeare's female characters is very striking, and it appears to me to be this:—Milton describes *Eve* not only as full of love and tenderness for *Adam*, but as the constant object of admiration in herself. She is the idol of the poet's imagination, and he paints her whole person with a studied profusion of charms. She is the wife, but she is still as much as ever the mistress, of *Adam*. She is represented, indeed, as devoted to her husband, as twining round him for support, "as the vine curls her tendrils," but her own grace and beauty are never lost sight of in the picture of conjugal felicity. *Adam's* attention and regard are as much to her as hers to him; for "in the first garden of their innocence," he had no other objects or pursuits to distract his attention; she was both his business and his pleasure. Shakspeare's females, on the contrary, seem to exist only in their attachment to others. They are pure abstractions of the affections. Their features are not painted, nor the colour of their hair. Their hearts only are laid open. We are acquainted with *Imogen*, *Miranda*, *Ophelia*, or *Desdemona*, by what they thought and felt, but we cannot tell whether they were black, brown, or fair. But Milton's *Eve* is all of ivory and gold. Shakspeare seldom tantalizes the reader with a luxurious display of the personal charms of his heroines, with a curious inventory of particular beauties, except indirectly, and for some other purpose, as where *Iachimo* describes *Imogen* asleep, or the old men in the *Winter's Tale* vie with each other in invidious praise of *Perdita*. Even in *Juliet*, the most voluptuous and

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glowing of the class of characters here spoken of, we are reminded chiefly of circumstances connected with the physiognomy of passion, as in her leaning with her cheek upon her arm, or which only convey the general impression of enthusiasm made on her lover's brain. One thing may be said, that Shakspeare had not the same opportunities as Milton: for his women were clothed, and it cannot be denied that Milton took *Eve* at a considerable disadvantage in this respect. He has accordingly described her in all the loveliness of nature, tempting to sight as the fruit of the Hesperides guarded by that Dragon old, herself the fairest among the flowers of Paradise!

The figures of both *Adam* and *Eve* are very prominent in this poem. As there is little action in it, the interest is constantly kept up by the beauty and grandeur of the images. They are thus introduced:

"Two of far nobler shape, erect and tall,
Godlike erect, with native honour clad,
In naked majesty seemed lords of all,
And worthy seemed; for in their looks divine
The image of their glorious Maker shone:
* * * * * * * * * * * * * * *
Though both
Not equal, as their sex not equal seem'd;
For contemplation he and valour form'd,
For softness she and sweet attractive grace;
He for God only, she for God in him.
His fair large front and eye sublime declar'd
Absolute rule; and hyacinthine locks
Round from his parted forelock manly hung
Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad;
She as a veil down to the slender waist
Her unadorned golden tresses wore
Dishevell'd, but in wanton ringlets wav'd
As the vine curls her tendrils, which implied
Subjection, but required with gentle sway,
And by her yielded, by him best receiv'd,
Yielded with coy submission, modest pride,
And sweet reluctant amorous delay."

Eve is not only represented as beautiful, but with conscious beauty. Shakspeare's heroines are almost insensible of their

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charms, and wound without knowing it. They are not coquets. If the salvation of mankind had depended upon one of them, we don't know—but the devil might have been baulked. This is but a conjecture! *Eve* has a great idea of herself, and there is some difficulty in prevailing on her to quit her own image, the first time she discovers its reflection in the water. She gives the following account of herself to *Adam*:—

"That day I oft remember, when from sleep
I first awak'd, and found myself repos'd
Under a shade of flow'rs, much wond'ring where
And what I was, whence thither brought and how.
Not distant far from thence a murmuring sound
Of waters issued from a cave, and spread
Into a liquid plain, then stood unmov'd
Pure as the expanse of Heav'n; I thither went
With unexperienc'd thought, and laid me down
On the green bank, to look into the clear
Smooth lake, that to me seemed another sky:
As I bent down to look just opposite
A shape within the wat'ry gleam appear'd,
Bending to look on me; I started back,
It started back; but pleas'd I soon return'd,
Pleas'd it return'd as soon with answ'ring looks
Of sympathy and love."

The poet afterwards adds:—

"So spake our general mother, and with eyes
Of conjugal attraction unreprov'd,
And meek surrender, half embracing lean'd
On our first father; half her swelling breast
Naked met his under the flowing gold
Of her loose tresses hid: he in delight
Both of her beauty and submissive charms
Smil'd with superior love, as Jupiter
On Juno smiles, when he impregns the clouds
That shed the May flowers."

The same thought is repeated with greater simplicity, and perhaps even beauty, in the beginning of the Fifth Book:—

"So much the more
His wonder was to find unwaken'd Eve
With tresses discompos'd and glowing cheek,

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As through unquiet rest: he, on his side,
Leaning half-rais'd with looks of cordial love
Hung over her enamour'd, and beheld
Beauty, which, whether waking or asleep,
Shot forth peculiar graces; then with voice
Mild, as when Zephyrus on Flora breathes,
Her hand soft touching, whisper'd thus: Awake
My fairest, my espous'd, my latest found,
Heav'n's last best gift, my ever new delight,
Awake.".....

The general style, indeed, in which *Eve* is addressed by *Adam*, or described by the poet, is in the highest strain of compliment:—

"When Adam thus to Eve. Fair consort, the hour
Of night approaches."
"To whom thus Eve, with perfect beauty adorned."
"To whom our general ancestor replied,
Daughter of God and Man, accomplish'd Eve."

Eve is herself so well convinced that these epithets are her due that the idea follows her in her sleep, and she dreams of herself as the paragon of nature, the wonder of the universe:—

"Methought
Close at mine ear, one call'd me forth to walk,
With gentle voice, I thought it thine; it said,
Why sleep'st thou, Eve? now is the pleasant time,
The cool, the silent, save where silence yields
To the night-warbling bird, that now awake
Tunes sweetest his love-labour'd song; now reigns
Full-orb'd the moon, and with more pleasing light
Shadowy sets off the face of things; in vain
If none regard; Heav'n wakes with all his eyes,
Whom to behold but thee, Nature's desire?
In whose sight all things joy, with ravishment
Attracted by thy beauty still to gaze."

This is the very topic, too, on which the Serpent afterwards enlarges with so much artful insinuation and fatal consequences of success. "So talked the spirited sly snake."—The conclusion of the foregoing scene, in which *Eve* relates her dream and *Adam* comforts her, is such an exquisite piece of description

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that, though not to my immediate purpose, I cannot refrain from quoting it:—

"So cheer'd he his fair spouse, and she was cheer'd;
But silently a gentle tear let fall
From either eye, and wip'd them with her hair;
Two other precious drops that ready stood,
Each in their crystal sluice, he ere they fell
Kiss'd, as the gracious signs of sweet remorse
And pious awe, that fear'd to have offended."

The formal eulogy on *Eve* which *Adam* addresses to the Angel, in giving an account of his own creation and hers, is full of elaborate grace:—

"Under his forming hand a creature grew,
——————so lovely fair
That what seem'd fair in all the world seem'd now
Mean, or in her summ'd up, in her contain'd
And in her looks, which from that time infus'd
Sweetness into my heart, unfelt before,
And into all things from her air inspir'd
The spirit of love and amorous delight."

That which distinguishes Milton from the other poets, who have pampered the eye and fed the imagination with exuberant descriptions of female beauty, is the moral severity with which he has tempered them. There is not a line in his works which tends to licentiousness, or the impression of which, if it has such a tendency, is not effectually checked by thought and sentiment. The following are two remarkable instances:—

"In shadier bower
More secret and sequester'd, though but feign'd,
Pan or Sylvanus never slept, nor Nymph,
Nor Faunus haunted. Here in close recess,
With flowers, garlands, and sweet smelling herbs,
Espoused Eve deck'd first her nuptial bed,
And heavenly quires the hymenæan sung,
What day the genial Angel to our sire
Brought her in naked beauty more adorn'd,
More lovely than Pandora, whom the Gods
Endow'd with all their gifts, and O too like
In sad event, when to th' unwiser son
Of Japhet brought by Hermes, she ensnar'd

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Mankind by her fair looks, to be aveng'd
On him who had stole Jove's authentic fire."

The other is a passage of extreme beauty and pathos blended. It is the one in which the Angel is described as the guest of our first ancestors:—

"Meanwhile at table Eve
Minister'd naked, and their flowing cups
With pleasant liquors crown'd: O innocence
Deserving Paradise! if ever, then,
Then had the sons of God excuse to have been
Enamour'd at that sight: but in those hearts
Love unlibidinous reigned, nor jealousy
Was understood, the injur'd lover's Hell."

The character which a living poet has given of Spenser would be much more true of Milton:—

"Yet not more sweet
Than pure was he, and not more pure than wise;
High Priest of all the Muses' mysteries."

Spenser, on the contrary, is very apt to pry into mysteries which do not belong to the Muses. Milton's voluptuousness is not lasciviousness nor sensual. He describes beautiful objects for their own sakes. Spenser has an eye to the consequences, and steeps every thing in pleasure, often not of the purest kind. The want of passion has been brought as an objection against Milton, and his *Adam* and *Eve* have been considered as rather insipid personages, wrapped up in one another, and who excite but little sympathy in any one else. I do not feel this objection myself: I am content to be spectator in such scenes, without any other excitement. In general the interest in Milton is essentially epic, and not dramatic; and the difference between the epic and the dramatic is this, that in the former the imagination produces the passion, and in the latter the passion produces the imagination. The interest of epic poetry arises from the contemplation of certain objects in themselves grand and beautiful; the interest of dramatic poetry from sympathy with the passions and pursuits of others; that is from the practical relations of certain persons to certain objects, as depending on accident or will.

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The Pyramids of Egypt are epic objects: the imagination of them is necessarily attended with passion; but they have no dramatic interest; till circumstances connect them with some human catastrophe. Now a poem might be constructed almost entirely of such images, of the highest intellectual passion, with little dramatic interest; and it is in this way that Milton has in a great measure constructed his poem. That is not its fault, but its excellence. The fault is in those who have no idea but of one kind of interest. But this question would lead to a longer discussion than I have room for at present. I shall conclude these extracts from Milton with two passages, which have always appeared to me to be highly affecting, and to contain a fine discrimination of character:

"O unexpected stroke, worse than of Death!
Must I thus leave thee, Paradise? thus leave
Thee, native soil, these happy walks and shades,
Fit haunt of Gods? Where I had hope to spend,
Quiet, though sad, the respite of that day
That must be mortal to us both. O flowers,
That never will in other climate grow,
My early visitation and my last
At even, which I bred up with tender hand
From the first opening bud, and gave ye names,
Who now shall rear ye to the sun, or rank
Your tribes, and water from th' ambrosial fount?
Thee, lastly, nuptial bow'r, by me adorn'd
With what to sight or smell was sweet, from thee
How shall I part, and whither wander down
Into a lower world, to this obscure
And wild? how shall we breathe in other air
Less pure, accustom'd to immortal fruits?"

This is the lamentation of *Eve* on being driven out of Paradise. *Adam's* reflections are in a different strain, and still finer. After expressing his submission to the will of his Maker, he says—

"This most afflicts me, that departing hence
As from his face I shall be hid, deprived
His blessed countenance; here I could frequent
With worship place by place where he vouchsaf'd
Presence divine, and to my sons relate,

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On this mount he appeared, under this tree
Stood visible, among these pines his voice
I heard, here with him at this fountain talk'd:
So many grateful altars I would rear
Of grassy turf, and pile up every stone
Of lustre from the brook, in memory
Or monument to ages, and thereon
Offer sweet-smelling gums and fruits and flowers.
In yonder nether world where shall I seek
His bright appearances, or footstep trace?
For though I fled him angry, yet, recall'd
To life prolong'd and promis'd race, I now
Gladly behold though but his utmost skirts
Of glory, and far off his steps adore."

III.

ON MR. WORDSWORTH'S POEM, "THE EXCURSION."

In power of intellect, in lofty conception, in the depth of feeling, at once simple and sublime, which pervades every part of it, and which gives to every object an almost preternatural and preter-human interest, this work has seldom been surpassed. The poem of the *Excursion* resembles that part of the country in which the scene is laid. It has the same vastness and magnificence, with the same nakedness and confusion. It has the same overwhelming, oppressive power. It excites or recals the same sensations which those who have traversed that wonderful scenery must have felt. We are surrounded with the constant sense and superstitious awe of the collective power of matter, of the gigantic and eternal forms of nature, on which, from the beginning of time, the hand of man has made no impression. Here are no dotted lines, no hedge-row beauties, no box-tree borders, no gravel walks, no square mechanic inclosures; all is left loose and irregular in the rude chaos of aboriginal nature. The boundaries of hill and valley are the poet's only geography, where we wander with him incessantly over deep beds of moss and waving fern, amidst the troops of red-deer and wild animals. Such is the severe simplicity of Mr. Wordsworth's taste that I

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doubt whether he would not reject a druidical temple, or time-hallowed ruin, as too modern and artificial for his purpose. He only familiarizes himself or his readers with a stone, covered with lichens, which has slept in the same spot of ground from the creation of the world, or with the rocky fissure between two mountains caused by thunder, or with a cavern scooped out by the sea. His mind is, as it were, coeval with the primary forms of things; his imagination holds immediately from nature, and "owes no allegiance" but "to the elements."

The *Excursion* may be considered as a philosophical pastoral poem,—as a scholastic romance. It is less a poem on the country than on the love of the country. It is not so much a description of natural objects as of the feeling associated with them; not on account of the manners of rural life, but the result of the poet's reflections on it. He does not present the reader with a lively succession of images or incidents, but paints the outgoings of his own heart, the shapings of his own fancy. He may be said to create his own materials; his thoughts are his real subject. His understanding broods over that which is "without form and void," and "makes it pregnant." He sees all things in himself. He hardly ever avails himself of remarkable objects or situations, but, in general, rejects them as interfering with the workings of his own mind, as disturbing the smooth, deep, majestic current of his own feelings. Thus his descriptions of natural scenery are not brought home distinctly to the naked eye by forms and circumstances, but every object is seen through the medium of innumerable recollections, is clothed with the haze of imagination like a glittering vapour, is obscured with the excess of glory, has the shadowy brightness of a waking dream. The image is lost in the sentiment, as sound in the multiplication of echoes,

> "And visions, as prophetic eyes avow,
> Hang on each leaf, and cling to every bough.'

In describing human nature, Mr. Wordsworth equally shuns the common 'vantage-grounds of popular story, of striking incident, or fatal catastrophe, as cheap and vulgar modes of producing an effect. He scans the human race as the naturalist

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measures the earth's zone, without attending to the picturesque points of view, the abrupt inequalities of surface. He contemplates the passions and habits of men, not in their extremes, but in the first elements; their follies and vices, not at their height, with all their embossed evils upon their heads, but as lurking in embryo,—the seeds of the disorder inwoven with our very constitution. He only sympathises with those simple forms of feeling which mingle at once with his own identity, or with the stream of general humanity. To him the great and the small are the same; the near and the remote; what appears, and what only is. The general and the permanent, like the Platonic ideas, are his only realities. All accidental varieties and individual contrasts are lost in an endless continuity of feeling; like drops of water in the ocean-stream! An intense intellectual egotism swallows up every thing. Even the dialogues introduced in the present volume are soliloquies of the same character, taking different views of the subject. The recluse, the pastor, and the pedler, are three persons in one poet. I myself disapprove of these "interlocutions between Lucius and Caius" as impertinent babbling, where there is no dramatic distinction of character. But the evident scope and tendency of Mr. Wordsworth's mind is the reverse of dramatic. It resists all change of character, all variety of scenery, all the bustle, machinery, and pantomime of the stage, or of real life,—whatever might relieve, or relax, or change the direction of its own activity, jealous of all competition. The power of his mind preys upon itself. It is as if there were nothing but himself and the universe. He lives in the busy solitude of his own heart; in the deep silence of thought. His imagination lends life and feeling only to "the bare trees and mountains bare;" peoples the viewless tracts of air, and converses with the silent clouds!

I could have wished that our author had given to his work the form of a didactic poem altogether, with only occasional digressions or allusions to particular instances. But he has chosen to encumber himself with a load of narrative and description, which sometimes hinders the progress and effect of the general reasoning, and which, instead of being inwoven with the text, would have come in better in plain prose as notes at the end of

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the volume. Mr. Wordsworth, indeed, says finely, and perhaps as truly as finely:—

> "Exchange the shepherd's frock of native gray
> For robes with regal purple tinged; convert
> The crook into a sceptre; give the pomp
> Of circumstance; and here the tragic Muse
> Shall find apt subjects for her highest art.
> Amid the groves, beneath the shadowy hills,
> The generations are prepared; the pangs,
> The internal pangs are ready; the dread strife
> Of poor humanity's afflicted will
> Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny."

But he immediately declines availing himself of these resources of the rustic moralist: for the priest, who officiates as "the sad historian of the pensive plain," says in reply:—

> "Our system is not fashioned to preclude
> That sympathy which you for others ask:
> And I could tell, not travelling for my theme
> Beyond the limits of these humble graves,
> Of strange disasters; but I pass them by,
> Loth to disturb what Heaven hath hushed to peace."

There is, in fact, in Mr. Wordsworth's mind an evident repugnance to admit anything that tells for itself without the interpretation of the poet,—a fastidious antipathy to immediate effect, —a systematic unwillingness to share the palm with his subject. Where, however, he has a subject presented to him, "such as the meeting soul may pierce," and to which he does not grudge to lend the aid of his fine genius, his powers of description and fancy seem to be little inferior to those of his classical predecessor, Akenside. Among several others which I might select, I give the following passage, describing the religion of ancient Greece:—

> "In that fair clime, the lonely herdsman, stretch'd
> On the soft grass through half a summer's day,
> With music lulled his indolent repose:
> And in some fit of weariness, if he,
> When his own breath was silent, chanced to hear
> A distant strain, far sweeter than the sounds
> Which his poor skill could make, his fancy fetch'd

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Even from the blazing chariot of the sun,
A beardless youth, who touched a golden lute,
And filled the illumined groves with ravishment.
The nightly hunter, lifting up his eyes
Towards the crescent moon, with grateful heart
Called on the lovely wanderer, who bestowed
That timely light, to share his joyous sport:
And hence, a beaming Goddess with her Nymphs
Across the lawn and through the darksome grove,
(Nor unaccompanied with tuneful notes
By echo multipled from rock or cave,)
Swept in the storm of chase, as moon and stars
Glance rapidly along the clouded heavens,
When winds are blowing strong. The traveller slaked
His thrist from rill, or gushing fount, and thanked
The Naiad.—Sun-beams, upon distant hills
Gliding apace, with shadows in their train,
Might, with small help from fancy, be transformed
Into fleet Oreads, sporting visibly.
The zephyrs fanning as they passed their wings,
Lacked not for love, fair objects, whom they wooed
With gentle whisper. Withered boughs grotesque,
Stripped of their leaves and twigs by hoary age,
From depth of shaggy covert peeping forth
In the low vale, or on steep mountain side:
And sometimes intermixed with stirring horns
Of the live deer, or goat's depending beard;
These were the lurking satyrs, a wild brood
Of gamesome Deities! or Pan himself,
The simple shepherd's awe-inspiring God."

The foregoing is one of a succession of splendid passages equally enriched with philosophy and poetry, tracing the fictions of Eastern mythology to the immediate intercourse of the imagination with Nature, and to the habitual propensity of the human mind to endow the outward forms of being with life and conscious motion. With this expansive and animating principle, Mr. Wordsworth has forcibly, but somewhat severely, contrasted the cold, narrow, lifeless spirit of modern philosophy:—

"How, shall our great discoverers obtain
From sense and reason less than these obtained,
Though far misled? Shall men from whom our age
Unbaffled powers of vision hath prepared

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To explore the world without, and world within,
Be joyless as the blind? Ambitious souls——
Whom earth at this late season hath produced
To regulate the moving spheres, and weigh
The planets in the hollow of their hand;
And they who rather dive than soar, whose pains
Have solved the elements, or analyzed
The thinking principle—shall they in fact
Prove a degraded race? And what avails
Renown, if their presumption make them such?
Inquire of ancient wisdom; go, demand
Of mighty nature, if 'twas ever meant
That we should pry far off, yet be unraised:
That we should pore, and dwindle as we pore,
Viewing all objects unremittingly
In disconnection dead and spiritless;
And still dividing and dividing still
Break down all grandeur, still unsatisfied
With the perverse attempt, while littleness
May yet become more little; waging thus
An impious warfare with the very life
Of our own souls!—And if indeed there be
An all-pervading spirit, upon whom
Our dark foundations rest, could he design,
That this magnificent effect of power,
The earth we tread, the sky which we behold
By day, and all the pomp which night reveals,
That these—and that superior mystery,
Our vital frame, so fearfully devised,
And the dread soul within it—should exist
Only to be examined, pondered, searched,
Probed, vexed, and criticised—to be prized
No more than as a mirror that reflects
To proud self-love her own intelligence?"

From the chemists and metaphysicians our author turns to the laughing sage of France, Voltaire. "Poor gentleman, it fares no better with him, for he's a wit." We cannot, however, agree with Mr. Wordsworth, that *Candide* is *dull*. It is, if our author pleases, "the production of a scoffer's pen," or it is anything but dull. It may not be proper in a grave, discreet, orthodox, promising young divine, who studies his opinions in the contraction or distension of his patron's brow, to allow any merit to a work like *Candide;* but I conceive that it would have

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been more manly in Mr. Wordsworth, nor do I think it would have hurt the cause he espouses, if he had blotted out the epithet, after it had peevishly escaped him. Whatsoever savours of a little, narrow, inquisitorial spirit, does not sit well on a poet and a man of genius. The prejudices of a philosopher are not natural. There is a frankness and sincerity of opinion, which is a paramount obligation in all questions of intellect, though it may not govern the decisions of the spiritual courts, who may, however, be safely left to take care of their own interests. There is a plain directness and simplicity of understanding, which is the only security against the evils of levity, on the one hand, or of hypocrisy, on the other. A speculative bigot is a solecism in the intellectual world. I can assure Mr. Wordsworth that I should not have bestowed so much serious consideration on a single voluntary perversion of language, but that my respect for his character makes me jealous of his smallest faults!

With regard to his general philippic against the contractedness and egotism of philosophical pursuits, I only object to its not being carried farther. I shall not affirm with Rousseau (his authority would perhaps have little weight with Mr. Wordsworth)—*Tout homme reflechi est mechant;* but I conceive that the same reasoning which Mr. Wordsworth applies so eloquently and justly to the natural philosopher and metaphysician may be extended to the moralist, the divine, the politician, the orator, the artist, and even the poet. And why so? Because wherever an intense activity is given to any one faculty, it necessarily prevents the due and natural exercise of others. Hence all those professions or pursuits where the mind is exclusively occupied with the ideas of things as they exist in the imagination or understanding, as they call for the exercise of intellectual activity, and not as they are connected with practical good or evil, must check the genial expansion of the moral sentiments and social affections; must lead to a cold and dry abstraction, as they are found to suspend the animal functions and relax the bodily frame. Hence the complaint of the want of natural sensibility and constitutional warmth of attachment in those persons who have been devoted to the pursuit of any art or science, —of their restless morbidity of temperament, and indifference to

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everything that does not furnish an occasion for the display of their mental superiority and the gratification of their vanity. The philosophical poet himself, perhaps, owes some of his love of nature to the opportunity it affords him of analysing his own feelings and contemplating his own powers,—of making every object about him a whole-length mirror to reflect his favourite thoughts, and of looking down on the frailties of others in undisturbed leisure, and from a more dignified height.

One of the most interesting parts of this work is that in which the author treats of the French Revolution, and of the feelings connected with it, in ingenuous minds, in its commencement and its progress. The *solitary*,* who, by domestic calamities and disappointments, had been cut off from society, and almost from himself, gives the following account of the manner in which he was roused from his melancholy:—

"From that abstraction I was roused—and how?
Even as a thoughtful shepherd by a flash
Of lightning, startled in a gloomy cave
Of these wild hills. For, lo! the dread Bastile,
With all the chambers in its horrid towers,
Fell to the ground: by violence o'erthrown
Of indignation; and with shouts that drowned
The crash it made in falling! From the wreck
A golden palace rose, or seemed
The appointed seat of equitable law
And mild paternal sway. The potent shock
I felt; the transformation I perceived to rise,
As marvellously seized as in that moment
When, from the blind mist issuing, I beheld
Glory—beyond all glory ever seen,
Dazzling the soul! Meanwhile prophetic harps
In every grove were ringing, 'War shall cease:
Did ye not hear that conquest is abjured?
Bring garlands, bring forth choicest flowers, to deck
The tree of liberty!'—My heart rebounded:
My melancholy voice the chorus joined.
Thus was I re-converted to the world;
Society became my glittering bride,
And airy hopes my children. From the depths
Of natural passion seemingly escaped,

* This word is not English.

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My soul diffused itself in wide embrace
Of institutions and the forms of things.
——————————If with noise
And acclamation, crowds in open air
Expressed the tumult of their minds, my voice
There mingled, heard or not. And in still groves,
Where mild enthusiasts tuned a pensive lay
Of thanks and expectation, in accord
With their belief, I sang Saturnian rule
Returned—a progeny of golden years
Permitted to descend, and bless mankind.
* * * * * * *
Scorn and contempt forbid me to proceed!
But history, time's slavish scribe, will tell
How rapidly the zealots of the cause
Disbanded—or in hostile ranks appeared:
Some, tired of honest service; these outdone,
Disgusted, therefore, or appalled, by aims
Of fiercer zealots.—So confusion reigned,
And the more faithful were compelled to exclaim,
As Brutus did to virtue, 'Liberty,
I worshipped thee, and find thee but a shade.'
SUCH RECANTATION HAD FOR ME NO CHARM,
NOR WOULD I BEND TO IT."

The subject is afterwards resumed, with the same magnanimity and philosophical firmness:—

——————————"For that other loss,
The loss of confidence in social man,
By the unexpected transports of our age
Carried so high, that every thought—which looked
Beyond the temporal destiny of the kind—
To many seemed superfluous; as no cause
For such exalted confidence could e'er
Exist; so, none is now for such despair.
The two extremes are equally remote
From truth and reason;—do not, then, confound
One with the other, but reject them both;
And choose the middle point, whereon to build
Sound expectations. This doth he advise
Who shared at first the illusion. At this day,
When a Tartarian darkness overspreads
The groaning nations; when the impious rule,
By will or by established ordinance,
Their own dire agents, and constrain the good

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To acts which they abhor; though I bewail
This triumph, yet the pity of my heart
Prevents me not from owning that the law,
By which mankind now suffers, is most just.
For by superior energies; more strict
Affiance in each other; faith more firm
In their unhallowed principles; the bad
Have fairly earned a victory o'er the weak,
The vacillating, inconsistent good."

In the application of these memorable lines, I should, perhaps, differ a little from Mr. Wordsworth; nor can I indulge with him in the fond conclusion afterwards hinted at, that one day *our* triumph, the triumph of humanity and liberty, may be complete. For this purpose, I think several things necessary which are impossible. It is a consummation which cannot happen till the nature of things is changed, till the many become as united as the *one*, till romantic generosity shall be as common as gross selfishness, till reason shall have acquired the obstinate blindness of prejudice, till the love of power and of change shall no longer goad man on to restless action, till passion and will, hope and fear, love and hatred, and the objects proper to excite them, that is, alternate good and evil, shall no longer sway the bosoms and businesses of men. All things move, not in progress, but in a ceaseless round; our strength lies in our weakness; our virtues are built on our vices; our faculties are as limited as our being; nor can we lift man above his nature more than above the earth he treads. But though I cannot weave over again the airy, unsubstantial dream, which reason and experience have dispelled,

"What though the radiance, which was once so bright,
Be now for ever taken from my sight,
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of glory in the grass, of splendour in the flower:"—

yet I will never cease, nor be prevented from returning on the wings of imagination to that bright dream of my youth; that glad dawn of the day-star of liberty; that spring time of the world, in which the hopes and expectations of the human race seemed opening in the same gay career with my own; when

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France called her children to partake her equal blessings beneath her laughing skies; when the stranger was met in all her villages with dance and festive songs, in celebration of a new and golden era; and when, to the retired and contemplative student, the prospects of human happiness and glory were seen ascending like the steps of Jacob's ladder, in bright and never-ending succession. The dawn of that day was suddenly overcast; that season of hope is past; it is fled with the other dreams of my youth, which I cannot recal, but has left behind it traces, which are not to be effaced by Birth-day and Thanksgiving odes, or the chanting of *Te Deums* in all the churches of Christendom. To those hopes eternal regrets are due; to those who maliciously and wilfully blasted them, in the fear that they might be accomplished, I feel no less what I owe—hatred and scorn as lasting!

Mr. Wordsworth's writings exhibit all the internal power, without the external form, of poetry. He has scarcely any of the pomp and decoration and scenic effect of poetry: no gorgeous palaces, nor solemn temples, awe the imagination; no cities rise "with glistering spires and pinnacles adorned;" we meet with no knights pricked forth on airy steeds; no hair-breadth 'scapes and perilous accidents by flood or field. Either from the predominant habit of his mind not requiring the stimulus of outward impressions, or from the want of an imagination teeming with various forms, he takes the common every day events and objects of nature, or rather seeks those that are the most simple and barren of effect; but he adds to them a weight of interest from the resources of his own mind, which makes the most insignificant things serious and even formidable. All other interests are absorbed in the deeper interest of his own thoughts, and find the same level. His mind magnifies the littleness of his subject, and raises its meanness; lends it his strength, and clothes it with borrowed grandeur. With him, a mole-hill, covered with wild thyme, assumes the importance of "the great vision of the guarded mount:" a puddle is filled with preternatural faces, and agitated with the fiercest storms of passion.

The extreme simplicity which some persons have objected to

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in Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, is to be found only in the subject and the style: the sentiments are subtle and profound. In the latter respect, his poetry is as much above the common standard or capacity, as in the other it is below it. His poems bear a distant resemblance to some of Rembrandt's landscapes, who, more than any other painter, created the medium through which he saw nature, and out of the stump of an old tree, a break in the sky, and a bit of water, could produce an effect almost miraculous.

Mr. Wordsworth's poems in general are the history of a refined and contemplative mind, conversant only with itself and nature. An intense feeling of the associations of this kind is the peculiar and characteristic feature of all his productions. He has described the love of nature better than any other poet. This sentiment, inly felt in all its force, and sometimes carried to an excess, is the source both of his strength and of his weakness.—However I may sympathize with Mr. Wordsworth in his attachment to groves and fields, I cannot extend the same admiration to their inhabitants, or to the manners of a country life in general. I go along with him, while he is the subject of his own narrative, but I take leave of him when he makes pedlers and ploughmen his heroes and the interpreters of his sentiments. It is, I think, getting into low company, and company, besides, that I do not like. I take Mr. Wordsworth himself for a great poet, a fine moralist, and a deep philosopher; but if he insists on introducing me to a friend of his, a parish clerk, or the barber of the village, who is as wise as himself, I must be excused if I draw back with some little want of cordial faith. I am satisfied with the friendship which subsisted between *Parson Adams* and *Joseph Andrews*.—The author himself lets out occasional hints that all is not as it should be among these northern Arcadians. Though, in general, he professes to soften the harsher features of rustic vice, he has given us one picture of depraved and inveterate selfishness, which I apprehend could only be found among the inhabitants of these boasted mountain districts. The account of one of his heroines concludes as follows:

> "A sudden illness seized her in the strength
> Of life's autumnal season.—Shall I tell

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How on her bed of death the matron lay,
To Providence submissive, so she thought;
But fretted, vexed, and wrought upon—almost
To anger, by the malady that griped
Her prostrate frame with unrelaxing power,
As the fierce eagle fastens on the lamb.
She prayed, she moaned—her husband's sister watched
Her dreary pillow, waited on her needs;
And yet the very sound of that kind foot
Was anguish to her ears!—'And must she rule
Sole mistress of this house when I am gone?
Sit by my fire—possess what I possessed—
Tend what I tended—calling it her own!'
Enough;—I fear too much.—Of nobler feeling
Take this example:—One autumnal evening,
While she was yet in prime of health and strength,
I well remember, while I passed her door,
Musing with loitering step, and upward eye
Turned towards the planet Jupiter, that hung
Above the centre of the vale, a voice
Roused me, her voice;—it said, 'That glorious star
In its untroubled element will shine
As now it shines, when we are laid in earth,
And safe from all our sorrows.'—She is safe,
And her uncharitable acts, I trust,
And harsh unkindnesses, are all forgiven;
Though, in this vale, remembered with deep awe!"

I think it is pushing our love of the admiration of natural objects a good deal too far to make it a set-off against a story like the preceding.

All country people hate each other. They have so little comfort that they envy their neighbours the smallest pleasure or advantage, and nearly grudge themselves the necessaries of life. From not being accustomed to enjoyment, they become hardened and averse to it—stupid, for want of thought—selfish, for want of society. There is nothing good to be had in the country, or, if there is, they will not let you have it. They had rather injure themselves than oblige any one else. Their common mode of life is a system of wretchedness and self-denial, like what we read of among barbarous tribes. You live out of the world. You cannot get your tea and sugar without sending to the next town for it: you pay double, and have it of

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the worst quality. The small-beer is sure to be sour—the milk skimmed—the meat bad, or spoiled in the cooking. You cannot do a single thing you like; you cannot walk out or sit at home, or write or read, or think or look as if you did, without being subject to impertinent curiosity. The apothecary annoys you with his complaisance; the parson with his superciliousness. If you are poor, you are despised; if you are rich, you are feared and hated. If you do any one a favour, the whole neighbourhood is up in arms; the clamour is like that of a rookery; and the person himself, it is ten to one, laughs at you for your pains, and takes the first opportunity of shewing you that he labours under no uneasy sense of obligation. There is a perpetual round of mischief-making and backbiting, for want of any better amusement. There are no shops, no taverns, no theatres, no opera, no concerts, no pictures, no public buildings, no crowded streets, no noise of coaches, or of courts of law,—neither courtiers nor courtesans, no literary parties, no fashionable routs, no society, no books, or knowledge of books. Vanity and luxury are the civilizers of the world, and sweeteners of human life. Without objects either of pleasure or action, it grows harsh and crabbed: the mind becomes stagnant, the affections callous, and the eye dull. Man left to himself soon degenerates into a very disagreeable person. Ignorance is always bad enough; but rustic ignorance is intolerable. Aristotle has observed that tragedy purifies the affections by terror and pity. If so, a company of tragedians should be established at the public expense, in every village or hundred, as a better mode of education than either Bell's or Lancaster's. The benefits of knowledge are never so well understood as from seeing the effects of ignorance, in their naked, undisguised state, upon the common country people. Their selfishness and insensibility are perhaps less owing to the hardships and privations, which make them, like people out at sea in a boat, ready to devour one another, than to their having no idea of anything beyond themselves and their immediate sphere of action. They have no knowledge of, and consequently can take no interest in, anything which is not an object of their senses, and of their daily pursuits. They hate all strangers, and have generally a nick-

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name for the inhabitants of the next village. The two young noblemen in Guzman d'Alfarache, who went to visit their mistresses only a league out of Madrid, were set upon by the peasants, who came round them calling out, "*a wolf.*" Those who have no enlarged or liberal ideas can have no disinterested or generous sentiments. Persons who are in the habit of reading novels and romances are compelled to take a deep interest, and to have their affections strongly excited by fictitious characters and imaginary situations; their thoughts and feelings are constantly carried out of themselves, to persons they never saw, and things that never existed: history enlarges the mind, by familiarizing us with the great vicissitudes of human affairs, and the catastrophes of states and kingdoms; the study of morals accustoms us to refer our actions to a general standard of right and wrong; and abstract reasoning, in general, strengthens the love of truth, and produces an inflexibility of principle which cannot stoop to low trick and cunning. Books, in Lord Bacon's phrase, are "a discipline of humanity." Country people have none of these advantages, nor any others to supply the place of them. Having no circulating libraries to exhaust their love of the marvellous, they amuse themselves with fancying the disasters and disgraces of their particular acquaintance. Having no hump-backed *Richard* to excite their wonder and abhorrence, they make themselves a bug-bear of their own, out of the first obnoxious person they can lay their hands on. Not having the fictitious distresses and gigantic crimes of poetry to stimulate their imagination and their passions, they vent their whole stock of spleen, malice, and invention, on their friends and next-door neighbours. They get up a little pastoral drama at home, with fancied events, but real characters. All their spare time is spent in manufacturing and propagating the lie for the day, which does its office, and expires. The next day is spent in the same manner. It is thus that they embellish the simplicity of rural life! The common people in civilized countries are a kind of domesticated savages. They have not the wild imagination, the passions, the fierce energies, or dreadful vicissitudes of the savage tribes, nor have they the leisure, the indolent enjoyments and romantic superstitions, which belonged to the

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pastoral life in milder climates, and more remote periods of society. They are taken out of a state of nature, without being put in possession of the refinements of art. The customs and institutions of society cramp their imaginations without giving them knowledge. If the inhabitants of the mountainous districts described by Mr. Wordsworth are less gross and sensual than others, they are more selfish. Their egotism becomes more concentrated, as they are more insulated, and their purposes more inveterate, as they have less competition to struggle with. The weight of matter which surrounds them crushes the finer sympathies. Their minds become hard and cold, like the rocks which they cultivate. The immensity of their mountains makes the human form appear little and insignificant. Men are seen crawling between heaven and earth, like insects to their graves. Nor do they regard one another any more than flies on a wall. Their physiognomy expresses the materialism of their character, which has only one principle—rigid self-will. They move on with their eyes and foreheads fixed, looking neither to the right nor to the left, with a heavy slouch in their gait, and seeming as if nothing would divert them from their path. I do not admire this plodding pertinacity, always directed to the main chance. There is nothing which excites so little sympathy, in my mind, as exclusive selfishness.—If my theory is wrong, at least it is taken from pretty close observation, and is, I think, confirmed by Mr. Wordsworth's own account.

Of the stories contained in the latter part of the volume, I like that of the Whig and Jacobite friends and of the good knight, Sir Alfred Irthing, the best. The last reminded me of a fine sketch of a similar character in the beautiful poem of *Hart Leap Well.* To conclude,—If the skill with which the poet had chosen his materials had been equal to the power which he has undeniably exerted over them; if the objects, whether persons or things) which he makes use of as the vehicle of his sentiments, had been such as to convey them in all their depth and force; then the production before me might indeed "have proved a monument," as he himself wishes it, worthy of the author, and of his country. Whether, as it is, this very original and powerful performance may not rather remain like one of

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those stupendous, but half-finished structures, which have been suffered to moulder into decay, because the cost and labour attending them exceeded their use or beauty, I feel that it would be presumptuous in me to determine.

IV.

POPE, LORD BYRON, AND MR. BOWLES.*

THIS is a very proper letter for a lord to write to his bookseller, and for Mr. Murray to show about among his friends, as it contains some dry rubs at Mr. Bowles, and some good hits at Mr. Southey and his "invariable principles." There is some good *hating* and some good writing in it, some coarse jests and some dogmatical assertions; but that it is by any means a *settler* of the question is what we are in all due form inclined to doubt. His Lordship, as a poet, is a little headstrong and self-willed, a spoiled child of nature and fortune: his philosophy and criticism have a tincture of the same spirit: he doles out his opinions with a great deal of frankness and spleen, saying, "This I like, that I loathe!" but he does not trouble himself, or the reader, with his reasons, any more than he accounts to his servants for the directions he gives them. This might seem too great a compliment in his Lordship to the public.

All this *pribble-prabble* about Pope, and Milton, and Shakspeare, and what foreigners say of us, and the Venus, and Antinous, and the Acropolis, and the Grand Canal at Venice, and the Turkish fleet, the Falconer's Shipwreck, and ethics, and ethical poetry (with the single exception of some bold picturesque sketches in the poet's best prose style) is what might be talked by any Bond-street lounger of them all, after a last night's debauch, in the intervals between the splashings of the soda-water and the acid taste of the port wine rising in the mouth. It is

* Letter to *** ***** on the Rev. W. L. Bowles's Strictures on the Life and Writings of Pope. By the Right Hon. Lord Byron. Third Edition. Murray.

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no better than that. If his Lordship had sent it in from Long's, or the Albany, to be handed about in Albemarle-street, in slips as he wrote it, it would have been very well. But all the way from Ravenna, cannot he contrive to send us something better than his own ill humour and our own common-places—than the discovery that Pope was a poet, and that Cowper was none; and the old story that Canova, in forming a statue, takes a hand from one, a foot from another, and a nose from a third, and so makes out the idea of perfect beauty! (I would advise his Lordship to say less about this subject of *virtu*, for he knows little about it; and, besides, his perceptions are at variance with his theories.) In truth, his Lordship has the worst of this controversy, though he throws out a number of pert, smart, flashy things, with the air of a man who sees company on subjects of taste, while his reverend antagonist, who is the better critic and logician of the two, goes prosing on in a tone of obsequious pertinacity and sore pleasantry, as if he were sitting (an unwelcome guest) at his lordship's table, and were awed, yet galled, by the cavalier assumption of patrician manners. I cannot understand these startling *voluntaries*, played off before the public on the ground of personal rank, nor the controversial under-song, like the drone of a bag-pipe, that forms a tedious accompaniment to them. As Jem Belcher, when asked if he did not feel a little awkward at facing Gamble, the tall Irishman, made answer, "An' please ye, sir, when I am stript to my shirt, I am afraid of no man;"—so I would advise Mr. Bowles, in a question of naked argument, to fear no man, and to let no man bite his thumb at him. If his Lordship were to invite his brother-poet to his house, and to eke out a sour jest by the flavour of Monte-Pulciano or Frontiniac,—if in the dearth of argument he were to ply his friend's weak side with rich sauces and well-seasoned hospitality, "*Ah! ça est bon, ah! goutez ça!*"—if he were to point, in illustration of Pope's style, to the marble pillars, the verandas, the pier glasses, the classic busts, the flowering dessert, and were to exclaim, "You see, my dear Bowles, the superiority of art over nature, the triumph of polished life over Gothic barbarism; we have here neither the ghosts nor fairies of Shakspeare, nor Milton's Heaven, nor *his* Hell,

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yet we contrive to do without them;"—it might require Parson Supple's command of countenance to smile off this uncourteous address; but the divine would not have to digest such awkward raillery on an empty stomach—he would have his *quid pro quo:* his Lordship would have paid for the liberty of using his privilege of peerage. But why any man should carry the *rôle* of his Lordship's chaplain out of his Lordship's house, is what I see no reason for.

Lord Byron, in the Preface to his Tragedy, complains that Horace Walpole has had hard measure dealt him by the critics, "firstly, because he was a lord, and secondly, because he was a gentleman." I do not know how the case may stand between the public and a dead nobleman; but a living lord has every reasonable allowance made him, and can do what no one else can. If Lord Byron chooses to make a bad joke, by means of an ill-spent pun, it is a condescension in his Lordship:—if he puts off a set of smart assertions and school-boy instances for pithy proofs, it is not because he is not able, but because he cannot be at the pains of going deeper into the question:—if he is rude to an antagonist, it is construed into agreeable familiarity; any notice from so great a man appears like a favour:—if he tells or recommends "a tale of bawdry," he is not to be tied down by the petty rules which restrict common men:—if he publishes a work which is thought of too equivocal a description for the delicate air of Albemarle-street, his Lordship's own name in the title-page is sufficient to back it without the formality of a bookseller's; if a wire-drawn tragedy of his is acted, in spite of his protestations against such an appeal to the taste of a vulgar audience, the storm of pitiless damnation is not let loose upon it, because it is felt that it would fall harmless on so high and proud a head; the gilded coronet serves as a conductor to carry off the lightning of popular criticism, which might blast the merely laurelled bard; the blame, the disappointment, the flat effect, is thrown upon the manager, upon the actors—upon anybody but the noble poet! This sounding title swells the mouth of Fame, and lends her voice a thousand circling echoes: the rank of the author, and the public charity extended to him, as he does not want it, cover a multitude of sins. What does

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his lordship mean, then, by this whining over the neglect of Horace Walpole,—this uncalled-for sympathy with the faded lustre of patrician and gentlemanly pretensions? Has *he* had only half of his fame?—or does he already feel, with morbid anticipation, the retiring ebb of that overwhelming tide of popularity which, having been raised too high by adventitious circumstances, is lost in flats and shallows, as soon as their influence is withdrawn? Lord Byron has been twice as much talked of as he would have been had he not been Lord Byron. His rank and genius have been happily placed "each other's beams to share," and both together, by their mutually reflected splendour, may be said to have melted the public coldness into the very wantonness of praise: the faults of the man (real or supposed) have only given a dramatic interest to his works.

Whence, then, this repining, this ungracious cavilling, this *got-up* ill-humour? We load his Lordship with ecstatic admiration, with unqualified ostentatious eulogies; and he throws them stifling back in our face: he thanks us with cool, cutting contempt: he asks us for our voices, "our sweet voices," like Coriolanus; and, like Coriolanus, disdains us for the unwholesome gift. Why, then, does he ask for it? If, as a lord, he holds in contempt and abhorrence the willing, delighted homage, which the public pay to the poet, let him retire and feed the pride of birth in stately solitude, or take his place among his equals: but if he does not find this enough, and wants our wondering tribute of applause to satisfy his craving vanity, and make him something more than a mere vulgar lord among hundreds of other lords, why dash the cup of delicious poison which, at his uneasy request, we tender him, to the ground, with indignant reckless hands, and tell us that he scorns equally our censure or our praise? If he looks upon both as equal impertinence, he can easily escape out of the reach of both by ceasing to write; we shall in that case soon cease to think of his Lordship: but if he cannot do without our good opinion, why affect all this coyness, coldness, and contempt? If he says he writes not to please us, but to live by us, that only alters the nature of the obligation, and he might still be civil to Mr. Murray's customers. Whether he is independent of public opinion,

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or dependent on it, he need not be always sending his readers to Coventry. When we come to offer him our demonstrations of good will, he should not kick us down stairs. If he persists in this humour, the distaste may in time "become mutual."

Before we proceed, there is one thing in which we must say we heartily agree with Lord Byron; and that is the ridicule with which he treats Mr. Bowles's editorial inquisition into the moral character of Pope. It is a pure piece of clerical priggism. If Pope was not free from vice, we should like to know who is. He was one of the most faultless of poets, both in his life and in his writings. We should not care to throw the first stone at him. We do not wonder at Lord Byron's laughing outright at Mr. Bowles's hysterical horrors at poor Pope's platonic peccadillos, nor at his being a little impatient of the other's attempt to make himself a *make-believe* character of perfection out of the "most small faults" he could rake up against the reputation of an author, whom he was bound either not to edit or not to injure. But we think his Lordship turns the tables upon the divine, and gets up into the reading-desk himself, without the proper canonical credentials when he makes such a fuss as he does about didactic or moral poetry as the highest of all others, because moral truth and moral conduct are of such vast and paramount concernment in human life. But because they are such good things in themselves, does it follow that they are the better for being put into rhyme? We see no connexion between "ends of verse, and sayings of philosophers." This reasoning reminds us of the critic who said that the only poetry he knew of, good for anything, was the four lines, beginning "Thirty days hath September, April, June, and November," for that these were really of some use in finding out the number of days in the different months of the year. The rules of arithmetic are important in many respects, but we do not know that they are the fittest subjects of poetry. Besides, Pope was not the only moral poet, nor are we sure that we understand his moral system, or that Lord Byron understands it, or that he understood it himself. Addison paraphrased the Psalms, and Blackmore sung the Creation: yet Pope has written a lampoon upon the one, and put the other in his Dunciad. Mr. Bowles has numbers of

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manuscript sermons by him, the morality of which, we will venture to say, is quite as pure, as orthodox, as that of the unpublished cantos of Don Juan; yet we doubt whether Mr. Murray, the Mæcenas of poetry and orthodoxy, would give as much for the one as for the other. We do not look for the flowers of fancy in moral treatises, nor for a homily in his Lordship's irregular stanzas. The Decalogue, as a practical prose composition, or as a body of moral laws and precepts, is of sufficient weight and authority; but we should not regard the putting of this into heroic verse as an effort of the highest poetry. That "Sternhold and Hopkins had great qualms" is no imputation on the pious rapture of the Hebrew bard: and we suspect his Lordship himself would object to the allegory in Spenser, as a drawback on the poetry, if it is in other respects to his Lordship's taste, which is more than we can pretend to determine. The Noble Letter-writer thus moralizes on this subject, and transposes the ordinary critical canons somewhat arbitrarily and sophistically.

"The depreciation of Pope is partly founded upon a false idea of the dignity of his order of poetry, to which he has partly contributed by the ingenuous boast,

> That not in Fancy's maze he wandered long,
> But *stoop'd* to Truth, and moraliz'd his song.

He should have written 'rose to truth.' In my mind the highest of all poetry is ethical poetry, as the highest of all earthly objects must be moral truth. Religion does not make a part of my subject; it is something beyond human powers, and has failed in all human hands except Milton's and Dante's, and even Dante's powers are involved in his delineation of human passions, though in supernatural circumstances. What made Socrates the greatest of men? His moral truth—his ethics. What proved Jesus Christ the Son of God hardly less than his miracles? His moral precepts. And if ethics have made a philosopher the first of men, and have not been disdained as an adjunct to his Gospel by the Deity himself, are we to be told that ethical poetry, or didactic poetry, or by whatever name you term it, whose object is to make men better and wiser, is not the *very first order* of poetry; and are we to be told this too by one

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of the priesthood? It requires more mind, more wisdom, more power, than all the 'forests' that ever were 'walked' for their 'description' and all the ethics that ever were founded upon fields of battle. The Georgics are indisputably, and, I believe, *undisputedly*, even a finer poem than the Æneid. Virgil knew this: he did not order *them* to be burnt.

The proper study of mankind is man.

"It is the fashion of the day to lay great stress upon what they call 'imagination' and 'invention,'—the two commonest of qualities: an Irish peasant, with a little whiskey in his head, will imagine and invent more than would furnish forth a modern poem. If Lucretius had not been spoiled by the Epicurean system, we should have had a far superior poem to any now in existence. As mere poetry, it is the first of Latin poems. What then has ruined it? His ethics. Pope had not this defect: his moral is as pure as his poetry is glorious." p. 42.

Really this is very inconsequential, incongruous reasoning. An Irish peasant, with a little whiskey in his head, would not fall upon more blunders, contradictions, and defective conclusions. Lord Byron talks of the ethical systems of Socrates and Jesus Christ. What made the former the great man he supposes?—The invention of his system—the discovery of sublime moral truths. Does Lord Byron mean to say that the mere repetition of the same precepts in prose, or the turning of them into verse, will make others as great, or will make a great man at all? The two things compared are wholly disparates. The finding out the 48th proposition in Euclid made Pythagoras a great man. Shall we say that the putting this into a grave, didactic distich would make either a great mathematician or a great poet? It would do neither the one nor the other; though, according to Lord Byron, this distich would belong to the highest class of poetry, "because it would do that in verse which one of the greatest of men had wished to accomplish in prose." Such is the way in which his lordship transposes the common sense of the question,—because it is his humour! The value of any moral truth depends on the philosophic invention implied in it. But this rests with the first author, and the general idea,

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which forms the basis of didactic poetry, remains the same, through all its mechanical transmissions afterwards. The merit of the ethical poet must therefore consist in his manner of adorning and illustrating a number of these general truths which are not his own, that is, in the poetical invention and imagination he brings to the subject, as Mr. Bowles has well shown, with respect to the episodes in the Essay on Man, the description of the poor Indian, and the lamb doomed to death, which are all the unsophisticated reader ever remembers of that much-talked-of production. Lord Byron clownishly chooses to consider all poetry but what relates to this ethical or didactic truth as "a lie." Is Lear a lie? Or does his Lordship prefer the story, or the moral, in Æsop's Fables? He asks "why must the *poet* mean the *liar*, the *feigner*, the *tale-teller?* A man may make and create better things than these."—He may make and create better things than a common-place, and he who does not makes and creates nothing. The ethical or didactic poet necessarily repeats after others, because general truths and maxims are limited. The individual instances and illustrations, which his Lordship qualifies as "lies," "feigning," and "tale-telling," are infinite, and give endless scope to the genius of the true poet. The rank of poetry is to be judged of by the truth and purity of the moral—so we find it "in the bond,"—and yet Cowper, we are told, was no poet. Is there any keeping in this, or is it merely an air? Again, we are given to understand that didactic poetry "requires more mind, more power than all the descriptive or epic poetry that ever was written:" and as a proof of this, his Lordship lays it down that the Georgics are a finer poem than the Æneid. We do not perceive the inference here. "Virgil knew this: he did not order *them* to be burnt.

> The proper study of mankind is man."

Does our author mean that this was Virgil's reason for liking his pastoral poetry better than his description of Dido and Æneas? But farther, there is a Latin poem (that of Lucretius) superior even to the Georgics; nay, it would have been so to any poem now in existence, but for one unlucky circumstance. And what is that? "Its ethics!" So that ethics have spoiled

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the finest poem in the world. This is the rub that makes didactic poetry come in such a questionable shape. If original, like Lucretius, there will be a difference of opinion about it. If trite and acknowledged, like Pope, however pure, there will be little valuable in it. It is the glory and the privilege of poetry to be conversant about those truths of nature and the heart that are at once original and self-evident. His Lordship ought to *have known this*. In the same passage, he speaks of imagination and invention as "the two commonest of qualities." We will tell his Lordship what is commoner—the want of them. "An Irish peasant," he adds, "with a little whiskey in his head, will imagine and invent more than"—(What? Homer, Spenser, and Ariosto? No: but than)—"would furnish forth a modern poem." That we will not dispute. But at any rate, when sober the next morning, he would be as "full of wise saws and modern instances" as his Lordship; and in either case, equally positive, tetchy, and absurd!

His Lordship, throughout his pamphlet, makes a point of contradicting Mr. Bowles, and, it would seem, of contradicting himself. He cannot be said to have any opinions of his own, but whatever any one else advances, he denies out of mere spleen and rashness. "He hates the word *invariable*," and not without reason. "What is there of human, be it poetry, philosophy, wit, wisdom, science, power, glory, mind, matter, life, or death, which is invariable?"—There is one of the particulars in this enumeration which seems pretty invariable, which is death. One would think that the principles of poetry are so too, notwithstanding his peevish disclaimer: for towards the conclusion of this letter he sets up Pope as a classic model, and considers all modern deviations from it as grotesque and barbarous.

"They have raised a mosque by the side of a Grecian temple of the purest architecture; and, more barbarous than the barbarians from whose practice I have borrowed the figure, they are not contented with their own grotesque edifice, unless they destroy *the prior and purely beautiful fabric which preceded*,* and which shames them and theirs for ever and ever."

* We have "purest architecture" just before; and "the prior fabric which preceded," is rather more than an inelegant pleonasm.

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Lord Byron has here substituted his own invariable principles for Mr. Bowles's, which he hates as bad as Mr. Southey's variable politics. Will nothing please his Lordship—neither dull fixtures nor shining weather-cocks?—We might multiply instances of a want of continuous reasoning, if we were fond of this sort of petty cavilling. Yet we do not know that there is any better quarry in the book. Why does his Lordship tell us that "ethical poetry is the highest of all poetry," and yet that "Petrarch the sonnetteer" is esteemed by good judges the very highest poet of Italy? Mr. Bowles is a sonnetteer, and a very good one. Why does he assert that "the poet who executes the best is the highest, whatever his department," and then affirm in the next page that didactic poetry "requires more mind, more wisdom, more power, than all the forests that ever were walked for their description;" and then again, two pages after, that "a good poet can make a silk purse of a sow's ear:" that is, as he interprets it, "can imbue a pack of cards with more poetry than inhabits the forests of America?" That's a *Non Sequitur*, as Partridge has it. Why, contending that all subjects are alike indifferent to the genuine poet, does he turn round upon himself, and assume that "the sun shining upon a warming pan cannot be made sublime or poetical?" Why does he say that "there is nothing in nature like the bust of the Antinous, except the Venus," which is not in nature?* Why does he call the first "that wonderful *creation* of perfect beauty," when it is a mere portrait, and on that account so superior to his favourite coxcomb the Apollo? Why does he state that "more poetry cannot be gathered into existence" than we here see, and yet that this poetry arises neither from nature nor moral exaltedness; Mr. Bowles and he being at issue on this very point, viz. the one affirming that the essence of poetry is derived from nature, and his Lordship, that it consists in moral truth? Why does he consider a shipwreck as an artificial incident? Why does he make the excellence of Falconer's Shipwreck consist in its technicalities, and not in its faithful description of common feelings and inevitable calamity? Why does he say

* See Mr. Bowles's Two Letters.

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all this, and much more, which he should not? Why does he write prose at all? Yet, in spite of all this trash, there is one passage for which we forgive him, and here it is.

"The truth is, that in these days the grand *primum mobile* of England is *cant;* cant political, cant poetical, cant religious, cant moral; but always cant, multiplied through all the varieties of life. It is the fashion, and, while it lasts, will be too powerful for those who can only exist by taking the tone of the times. I say *cant*, because it is a thing of words, without the smallest influence upon human actions; the English being no wiser, no better, and much poorer, and more divided among themselves, as well as far less moral, than they were before the prevalence of this verbal decorum." These words should be written in letters of gold, as the testimony of a lofty poet to a great moral truth, and we can hardly have a quarrel with the writer of them.

There are three questions which form the subject of the present pamphlet; viz. What is poetical? What is natural? What is artificial? And we get an answer to none of them. The controversy, as it is carried on between the chief combatants, is much like a dispute between two artists, one of whom should maintain that blue is the only colour fit to paint with, and the other that yellow alone ought ever to be used. Much might be said on both sides, but little to the purpose. Mr. Campbell leads off the dance, and launches a ship as a beautiful and poetical artificial object. But he so loads it with patriotic, natural, and foreign associations, and the sails are "so perfumed that the winds are love-sick," that Mr. Bowles darts upon and seizes it as contraband to art, swearing that it is no longer the work of the shipwright, but of Mr. Campbell's lofty poetic imagination; and dedicates its stolen beauty to the right owners, the sun, the winds, and the waves. Mr. Campbell, in his eagerness to make all sure, having overstepped the literal mark, presses no farther into the controversy; but Lord Byron, who is "like an Irishman in a row, *any body's customer*," carries it on with good polemical hardihood, and runs a very edifying parallel between the ship without the sun, the winds and waves,—and the sun, the winds, and waves without the ship. "The sun," says Mr.

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Bowles, "is poetical, by your Lordship's admission." We think it would have been so without it. But his Lordship contends that "the sun would no longer be poetical, if it did not shine on ships, or pyramids, or fortresses, and other works of art," (he expressly excludes "footmen's liveries" and "brass warming-pans" from among those artificial objects that reflect new splendour on the eye of Heaven)—to which Mr. Bowles replies, that let the sun but shine, and "it is poetical *per se*," in which we think him right. His Lordship decompounds the wind into a *caput mortuum* of poetry, by making it howl through a pig-stye, instead of

Roaming the illimitable ocean wide;

and turns a water-fall, or a clear spring, into a slop-basin, to prove that nature owes its elegance to art. His Lordship is "ill at these numbers." Again, he affirms that the ruined temple of the Parthenon is poetical, and the coast of Attica, with Cape Colonna, and the recollection of Falconer's Shipwreck, classical. Who ever doubted it? What then? Does this prove that the Rape of the Lock is not a mock-heroic poem? He assures us that a storm with cock-boats scudding before it is interesting, particularly if this happens to take place in the Hellespont, over which the noble critic swam; and makes it a question whether the dark cypress groves, or the white towers and minarets of Constantinople, are more impressive to the imagination? What has this to do with Pope's grotto at Twickenham, or the boat in which he paddled across the Thames to Kew? Lord Byron tells us (and he should know) that the Grand Canal at Venice is a muddy ditch, without the stately palaces by its side; but then it is a natural, not an artificial, canal; and finally, he asks, what would the desert of Tadmor be without the ruins of Palmyra, or Salisbury Plain without Stone-Henge? Mr. Bowles, who, though tedious and teazing, has "damnable iteration in him," and has read the Fathers, answers very properly, by saying that a desert alone "conveys ideas of immeasurable distance, of profound silence, of solitude;" and that Salisbury Plain has the advantage of Hounslow Heath, chiefly in getting rid of the ideas of artificial life, "carts, caravans, raree-showmen,

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butchers' boys, coaches with coronets, and livery servants behind them," even though Stone-Henge did not lift its pale head above its barren bosom. Indeed, Lord Byron's notions of art and poetry are sufficiently wild, romantic, far-fetched, obsolete: his taste is Oriental, Gothic; his Muse is not domesticated; there is nothing *mimmince-pimmince*, modern, polished, light, fluttering, in his standard of the sublime and beautiful: if his thoughts are proud, pampered, gorgeous, and disdain to mingle with the objects of humble, unadorned nature, his lordly eye at least "keeps distance due" from the vulgar vanities of fashionable life; from drawing-rooms, from card-parties, and from courts. He is not a carpet poet. He does not sing the sofa, like poor Cowper. He is qualified neither for poet-laureat nor court-newsman. He is at issue with the Morning Post and Fashionable World on what constitutes the true pathos and sublime of human life. He hardly thinks Lady Charlemont so good as the Venus, or as an Albanian girl that he saw mending the road in the mountains. If he does not like flowers and forests, he cares as little for stars, garters, and princes' feathers, for diamond necklaces and paste buckles. If his Lordship cannot make up his mind to the quiet, the innocence, the simple, unalterable grandeur of nature, we are sure that he hates the frippery, the foppery, and pert grimace of art, quite as much. His Lordship likes the poetry, the imaginative part of art, and so do we; and so we believe did the late Mr. John Scott. He likes the *sombre* part of it, the thoughtful, the decayed, the ideal, the spectral shadow of human greatness, the departed spirit of human power. He sympathizes not with art as a display of ingenuity, as the triumph of vanity or luxury, as it is connected with the idiot, superficial, petty self-complacency of the individual and the moment (these are to him not "luscious as locusts, but bitter as coloquintida;") but he sympathizes with the triumphs of Time and Fate over the proudest works of man—with the crumbling monuments of human glory—with the dim vestiges of countless generations of men—with that which claims alliance with the grave, or kindred with the elements of nature. This is what he calls art and artificial poetry. But this is not what anybody else understands by the terms, commonly or critically speaking.

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There is as little connection between the two things as between the grand-daughters of Mr. Coutts, who appeared at court the other day, and Lady Godiva—as there is between a reigning toast and an Egyptian mummy. Lord Byron, through the whole of the argument, pelts his reverend opponent with instances, like throwing a stone at a dog, which the incensed animal runs after, picks up, mumbles between his teeth, and tries to see what it is made of. The question is, however, too tough for Mr. Bowles's powers of mastication, and, though the fray is amusing, nothing comes of it. Between the Editor of Pope and the Editor of the New Monthly Magazine, his Lordship sits

> ——— high arbiter,
> And by decision more embroils the fray.

What is the use of taking a work of art, from which "all the art of art is flown," a mouldering statue, or a fallen column in Tadmor's marble waste, that staggers and overawes the mind, and gives birth to a thousand dim reflections, by seeing the power and pride of man prostate and laid low in the dust; what is there in this to prove the self-sufficiency of the upstart pride and power of man? A ruin is poetical. Because it is a work of art, says Lord Byron. No, but because it is a work of art o'erthrown. In it we see, as in a mirror, the life, the hopes, the labour of man defeated, and crumbling away under the slow hand of time; and all that he has done reduced to nothing, or to a useless mockery. Or as one of the bread-and-butter poets has described the same thing a little differently, in his tale of Peter Bell the potter,—

> The stones and tower
> Seem'd fading fast away
> From human thoughts and purposes,
> To yield to some transforming power,
> And blend with the surrounding trees.

If this is what Lord Byron means by artificial objects, there is an end of the question, for he will get no critic, no school to differ with him. But a fairer instance would be a snug citizen's box by the road-side, newly painted, plastered, and furnished, with every thing in the newest fashion and gloss, not an article

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the worse for wear, and a lease of one-and-twenty years to run, and then let us see what Lord Byron, or his friend and "host of human life" will make of it, compared with the desolation and the waste of all these comforts, arts, and elegances. Or let him take—not the pyramids of Egypt, but the Pavilion at Brighton, and make a poetical description of it in prose or verse. I defy him. The poetical interest, in his Lordship's transposed cases, arises out of the imaginary interest. But the truth is that, where art flourishes and attains its object, imagination droops, and poetry along with it. It ceases, or takes a different and ambiguous shape; it may be elegant, ingenious, pleasing, instructive, but if it aspires to the semblance of a higher interest, or the ornaments of the highest fancy, it necessarily becomes burlesque, as for instance in the Rape of the Lock. As novels end with marriage, poetry ends with the consummation and success of art. And the reason (if Lord Byron would attend to it) is pretty obvious. Where all the wishes and wants are supplied, anticipated by art, there can be no strong cravings after ideal good nor dread of unimaginable evils; the sources of terror and pity must be dried up: where the hand has done everything, nothing is left for the imagination to do or to attempt: where all is regulated by conventional indifference, the full workings, the involuntary, uncontrollable emotions of the heart cease: property is not a poetical, but a practical prosaic idea, to those who possess and clutch it, and cuts off others from cordial sympathy; but nature is common property, the unenvied idol of all eyes, the fairy ground where fancy plays her tricks and feats; and the passions, the workings of the heart (which Mr. Bowles very properly distinguishes from manners, inasmuch as they are not in the power of the will to regulate or satisfy,) are still left as a subject for something very different from didactic or mock-heroic poetry. By *art* and *artificial*, as these terms are applied to poetry or human life, we mean those objects and feelings which depend for their subsistence and perfection on the will and arbitrary conventions of man and society; and by nature, and natural objects, we mean those objects which exist in the universe at large, without, or in spite of, the interference of human power and contrivance, and those interests and affections which are not amena-

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ble to the human will. That we are to exclude art, or the operation of the human will, from poetry altogether, is what we do not affirm; but we mean to say that where this operation is the more complete and manifest, as in the creation of given objects, or regulation of certain feelings, there the spring of poetry, *i. e.* of passion and imagination, is proportionably and much impaired. We are masters of Art, Nature is our master; and it is to this great power that we find working above, without, and within us, that the genius of poetry bows and offers up its highest homage. If the infusion of art were not a natural disqualifier for poetry, the most artificial objects and manners would be the most poetical: on the contrary, it is only the rude beginnings, or the ruinous decay of objects of art, or the simplest modes of life and manners, that admit of or harmonize kindly with, the tone and language of poetry. To consider the question otherwise is not to consider it too curiously, but not to understand it at all. Lord Byron talks of Ulysses striking his horse Rhesus with his bow, as an instance of the heroic in poetry. But does not the poetical dignity of the instrument arise from its very commonness and simplicity? A bow is not a supererogation of the works of art. It is almost peculiar to a state of nature, that is, the first and rudest state of society. Lord Byron might as well talk of a shepherd's crook, or the garland of flowers with which he crowns his mistress, as images borrowed from artificial light. He cannot make a gentleman-usher's rod poetical, though it is the pink of courtly and gentlemanly refinement. Will the bold stickler for the artificial essence of poetry translate Pope's description of Sir Plume,—

> Of amber-headed snuff-box justly vain,
> And the nice conduct of a clouded cane,—

into the same sort of poetry as Homer's description of the bow of Ulysses? It is out of the question. The very mention of the last has a sound with it like the twang of the bow itself; whereas the others, the snuff-box and clouded-cane, are of the very essence of effeminate impertinence. Pope says, in Spence's Anecdotes, that "a lady of fashion would admire a star, because it would remind her of the twinkling of a lamp on a ball-night."

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This is a much better account of his own poetry than his noble critic has given. It is a clue to a real solution of the difficulty. What is the difference between the feeling with which we contemplate a gas-light in one of the squares, and the crescent moon beside it, but this—that though the brightness, the beauty perhaps, to the mere sense, is the same or greater, yet we know that when we are out of the square, we shall lose sight of the lamp, but that the moon will lend us its tributary light wherever we go; it streams over green valley or blue ocean alike; it is hung up in air, a part of the pageant of the universe; it steals with gradual, softened state into the soul, and hovers, a fairy-apparition, over our existence! It is this which makes it a more poetical object than a patent-lamp, or a Chinese lanthorn, or the chandelier at Covent-garden, brilliant as it is, and which, though it were made ten times more so, would still only dazzle and scorch the sight so much the more; it would not be attended with a mild train of reflected glory; it would "denote no foregone conclusion," would touch no chord of imagination or the heart; it would have nothing romantic about it.—A man can make anything, but he cannot make a sentiment! It is a thing of inveterate prejudice, of old association, of common feeling, and so is poetry, as far as it is serious. A "pack of cards," a silver bodkin, a paste buckle, "may be imbued" with as much mock poetry as you please, by lending false associations to it; but real poetry, or poetry of the highest order, can only be produced by unravelling the real web of associations, which have been wound round any subject by nature, and the unavoidable conditions of humanity. Not to admit this distinction at the threshold is to confound the style of Tom Thumb with that of the Moor of Venice, or Hurlothrumbo with the Doge of Venice. It is to mistake jest for earnest, and one thing for another.

> How far that little candle throws its beams!
> So shines a good deed in a naughty world.

The image here is one of artificial life; but it is connected with natural circumstances and romantic interests, with darkness, with silence, with distance, with privation, and uncertain danger: it is common, obvious, without pretension or boast, and

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therefore the poetry founded upon it is natural, because the feelings are so. It is not the splendour of the candle itself, but the contrast to the gloom without,—the comfort, the relief it holds out from afar to the benighted traveller,—the conflict between nature and the first and cheapest resources of art, that constitutes the romantic and imaginary, that is, the poetical interest, in that familiar but striking image. There is more art in the lamp or chandelier; but, for that very reason, there is less poetry. A light in a watch-tower, a beacon at sea, is sublime for the same cause; because the natural circumstances and associations set it off; it warns us against danger, it reminds us of common calamity, it promises safety and hope: it has to do with the broad feelings and circumstances of human life, and its interest does not assuredly turn upon the vanity or pretensions of the maker or proprietor of it. This sort of art is co-ordinate with nature, and comes into the first class of poetry, but no one ever dreamt of the contrary. The features of nature are great leading landmarks, not near and little, or confined to a spot, or an individual claimant; they are spread out everywhere the same, and are of universal interest. The true poet has therefore been described as

> Creation's tenant, he is nature's heir.

What has been thus said of the man of genius might be said of the man of no genius. The spirit of poetry and the spirit of humanity are the same. The productions of nature are not locked up in the cabinets of the curious, but spread out on the green lap of earth. The flowers return with the cuckoo in the spring: the daisy for ever looks bright in the sun; the rainbow still lifts its head above the storm to the eye of infancy or age—

> So was it when my life began:
> So is it now I am a man,
> So shall it be till I grow old and die;

but Lord Byron does not understand this, for he does not understand Mr. Wordsworth's poetry, and we cannot make him. His Lordship's nature, as well as his poetry, is something arabesque and outlandish.—Again, once more, what, we would ask,

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makes the difference between an opera of Mozart's, and the singing of a thrush confined in a wooden cage at the corner of the street in which we live? The one is nature, and the other is art: the one is paid for, and the other is not. Madame Fodor sings the air of *Vedrai Carino* in *Don Giovanni* so divinely because she is hired to sing it; she sings it to please the audience, not herself, and does not always like to be *encored* in it; but the thrush that awakes us at day-break with its song does not sing because it is paid to sing, or to please others, or to be admired or criticised: it sings because it is happy: it pours the thrilling sounds from its throat, to relieve the overflowings of its own breast—the liquid notes come from, and go to, the heart, dropping balm into it, as the gushing spring revives the traveller's parched and fainting lips. That stream of joy comes pure and fresh to the longing sense, free from art and affectation; the same that rises over vernal groves, mingled with the breath of morning, and the perfumes of the wild hyacinth; that waits for no audience, that wants no rehearsing, that exhausts its raptures, and is still—

Hymns its good God, and carols sweet of love.

There is this great difference between nature and art, that the one *is* what the other *seems*, and gives all the pleasure it expresses, because it feels it itself. Madame Fodor sings, as a musical instrument may be made to play a tune, and perhaps with no more real delight: but it is not so with the linnet or the thrush, that sings because God pleases, and pours out its little soul in pleasure. This is the reason why its singing is (so far) so much better than melody or harmony, than bass or treble, than the Italian or the German school, than quavers or crotchets, or half-notes, or canzonets, or quartetts, or anything in the world but truth and nature!

To give one more instance or two of what we understand by a natural interest ingrafted on artificial objects, and of the principle that still keeps them distinct. Amelia's "hashed mutton" in Fielding is one that we might mention. Hashed mutton is an article in cookery, homely enough in the scale of art, though far removed from the simple products of nature; yet we should

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say that this common delicacy which Amelia provided for her husband's supper, and then waited so long in vain for his return, is the foundation of one of the most natural and affecting incidents in one of the most natural and affecting books in the world.—No description of the most splendid and luxurious banquet could come up to it. It will be remembered, when the *Almanach des Gourmands*, and even the article on it in the last Edinburgh Review, are forgotten. Did Lord Byron never read Boccaccio? We wish he would learn refinement from him, and get rid of his hard *bravura* taste, and swash-buckler conclusions. What makes the charm of the story of the Falcon? Is it properly art or nature? The tale is one of artificial life, and elegant manners, and chivalrous pretensions; but it is the fall from these, the decline into the vale of low and obscure poverty,—the having but one last loop left to hang life on, and the sacrifice of that to a feeling still more precious, and which could only give way with life itself,—that elevates the sentiment, and has made it find its way into all hearts. Had Federigo Alberigi had an aviary of hawks, and preserves of pheasants without end, he and his poor bird would never have been heard of. It is not the expense and ostentation of the entertainment he sets before his mistress, but the prodigality of affection, squandering away the last remains of his once proud fortunes, that stamps this beautiful incident on the remembrance of all who have ever read it. We wish Lord Byron would look it over again, and see whether it does not most touch the chords of pathos and sentiment in those places where we feel the absence of all the pomp and vanities of art. Mr. Campbell talks of a ship as a sublime and beautiful object in art. We will confess we always stop to look at the mail-coaches with no slight emotion, and, perhaps, extend our hands after some of them, in sign of gratulation. They carry the letters of friends, of relations; they keep up the communication between the heart of a country. We do not admire them for their workmanship, for their speed, for their livery—there is something more in it than this. Perhaps we can explain it by saying, that we once heard a person observe—"I always look at the Shrewsbury mail, and sometimes with tears in my eyes: that is the coach that will

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bring me the news of the death of my father and mother." His Lordship will say, the mail-coach is an artificial object. Yet we think the interest here was not founded upon that circumstance. There was a finer and deeper link of affection that did not depend on the red painted pannels, or the *dyed garments* of the coachman and guard. At least it strikes us so.

This is not an easy subject to illustrate, and it is still more difficult to define. Yet we shall attempt something of the sort. 1. Natural objects are common and obvious, and are imbued with an habitual and universal interest, without being vulgar. Familiarity in them does not breed contempt, as it does in the works of man. They form an ideal class; their repeated impression on the mind, in so many different circumstances, grows up into a sentiment. The reason is, that we refer them generally and collectively to ourselves, as links and mementos of our various being; whereas, we refer the works of art respectively to those by whom they are made or to whom they belong. This distracts the mind in looking at them, and gives a petty and unpoetical character to what we feel relating to them. When the works of art become poetical, it is when they are emancipated from this state of "circumscription and confine," by some circumstance that sets aside the idea of property and individual distinction. The sound of village bells,—

——The poor man's only music,*

excites as lively an interest in the mind as the warbling of a thrush: the sight of a village spire presents nothing discordant with the surrounding scenery.

2. Natural objects are more akin to poetry and the imagination, partly because they are not our own handy-work, but start up spontaneously, like a visionary creation, of their own accord, without our knowledge or connivance—

> The earth hath bubbles, as the water hath,
> And these are of them;—

and farther, they have this advantage over the works of art, that the latter either fall short of their pre-conceived intention,

* Coleridge.

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and excite our disgust and disappointment by their defects; or, if they completely answer their end, they then leave nothing to the imagination, and so excite little or no romantic interest that way. A Count Rumford stove, or a Dutch oven, are useful for the purposes of warmth or culinary dispatch. Gray's purring favourite would find great comfort in warming its nose before the one, or dipping its whiskers in the other; and so does the artificial animal, man: but the poetry of Rumford grates or Dutch ovens it would puzzle even Lord Byron to explain. Cowper has made something of the "loud hissing urn," though Mr. Southey, as being one of the more refined "naturals," still prefers "the song of the kettle." The more our senses, our self-love, our eyes and ears, are surrounded, and, as it were, saturated with artificial enjoyments and costly decorations, the more the avenues to the imagination and the heart are unavoidably blocked up. We do not say that this may not be an advantage to the individual; we say it is a disadvantage to the poet. Even "Mine Host of Human Life" has felt its palsying, enervating influence. Let any one (after ten years old) take shelter from a shower of rain in Exeter Change, and see how he will amuse the time with looking over the trinkets, the chains, the seals, the curious works of art. Compare this with the description of Una and the Red Cross Knight in Spenser:

> Enforc'd to seek some covert nigh at hand,
> A shady grove not far away they spied,
> That promis'd aid the tempest to withstand:
> Whose lofty trees, yclad with summer's pride,
> Did spread so broad that heaven's light did hide,
> Not pierceable with power of any star;
> And all within were paths and alleys wide,
> With footing worn, and leading inward far;
> Far harbour that them seems; so in they enter'd are.
>
> And forth they pass, with pleasure forward led,
> Joying to hear the birds' sweet harmony,
> Which therein shrowded from the tempest's dread,
> Seem'd in their song to scorn the cruel sky.
> Much can they praise the trees so straight and high,
> The sailing pine, the cedar proud and tall,
> The vine-prop elm, the poplar never dry,

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The builder oak, sole king of forests all,
The aspen good for staves, the cypress funeral.*

Artificial flowers look pretty in a lady's head-dress; but they will not do to stick into lofty verse. On the contrary, a crocus bursting out of the ground seems to blush with its own golden light—"a thing of life." So a greater authority than Lord Byron has given his testimony on this subject: "Behold the lilies of the field, they toil not, neither do they spin; yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." Shakspeare speaks of

——————Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty.

All this play of fancy and dramatic interest could not be transferred to a description of hot-house plants, regulated by a thermometer. Lord Byron unfairly enlists into the service of his argument those artificial objects which are direct imitations of nature, such as statuary, &c. This is an oversight. At this rate, all poetry would be artificial poetry. Dr. Darwin is among those who have endeavoured to confound the distinctions of

* Most people have felt the *ennui* of being detained under a gateway in a shower of rain. Happy is he who has an umbrella, and can escape when the first fury of the storm has abated. Turn this gateway into a broker's shop, full of second-hand furniture—tables, chairs, bedsteads, bolsters, and all the accommodations of man's life,—the case will not be mended. On the other hand, convert it into a wild natural cave, and we may idle away whole hours in it, marking a streak in the rock, or a flower that grows on the sides, without feeling time hang heavy on us. The reason is that, where we are surrounded with the works of man—the sympathy with the art and purposes of man, as it were, irritates our own will, and makes us impatient of whatever interferes with it: while, on the contrary, the presence of nature, of objects existing without our intervention and controul, disarms the will of its restless activity, and disposes us to submit to accidents that we cannot help, and the course of outward events, without repining. We are thrown into the hands of nature, and become converts to her power. Thus the idea of the artificial, the conventional, the voluntary, is fatal to the romantic and imaginary. To us it seems that the free spirit of nature rushes through the soul, like a stream with a murmuring sound, the echo of which is poetry.

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natural and artificial poetry, and indeed, he is, perhaps, the only one who has gone the whole length of Lord Byron's hyper-critical and super-artificial theory. Here are some of his lines, which have been greatly admired:

Apostrophe to Steel.

Hail adamantine steel! magnetic lord,
King of the prow, the ploughshare, and the sword!
True to the pole, by thee the pilot guides
His steady course amid the struggling tides,
Braves with broad sail the immeasurable sea,
Cleaves the dark air, and asks no star but thee!

This is the true false gallop of the sublime. Yet steel is a very useful metal, and doubtless performs all these wonders. But it has not, among so many others, the virtue of amalgamating with the imagination. We might quote also his description of the spinning-jenny, which is pronounced by Dr. Aikin to be as ingenious a piece of mechanism as the object it describes; and, according to Lord Byron, this last is as well suited to the manufacture of verses as of cotton twist without end.

3. Natural interests are those which are real and inevitable, and are so far contradistinguished from the artificial, which are factitious and affected. If Lord Byron cannot understand the difference, he may find it explained by contrasting some of Chaucer's characters and incidents with those in the Rape of the Lock, for instance. Custance, floating in her boat on the wide sea, is different from Pope's heroine,

Launched on the bosom of the silver Thames.

Griselda's loss of her children, one by one, of her *all*, does not belong to the same class of incidents, nor of subjects for poetry, as Belinda's loss of her favorite curl. A sentiment that has rooted itself in the heart, and can only be torn from it with life, is not like the caprice of the moment—the putting on of paint and patches, or the pulling off a glove. The inbred character is not like a masquerade dress. There is a difference between the theatrical and natural, which is important to the determination of the present question, and which has been overlooked by his Lordship. Mr. Bowles, however, formally inserts

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(and with the best right in the world) on the distinction between passion and manners. But he agrees with Lord Byron that the Epistle to Abelard is the height of the pathetic.

> Strange that such difference should be
> 'Twixt tweedledum and tweedledee.

That it is in a great degree pathetic, I should be among the last to dispute; but its character is more properly rhetorical and voluptuous. That its interest is of the highest or deepest order is what I should wonder to hear any one affirm who is intimate with Shakspeare, Chaucer, Boccaccio, our own early dramatists, or the Greek tragedians. There is more true, unfeigned, unspeakable, heartfelt distress in one line of Chaucer's tale just mentioned,

> Let me not like a worm go by the way,

than in all Pope's writings put together; and I say it without any disrespect to him, too. Didactic poetry has to do with manners, as they are regulated, not by fashion or caprice, but by abstract reason and grave opinion, and is equally remote from the dramatic, which describes the involuntary and unpremeditated impulses of nature. As Lord Byron refers to the Bible, I would just ask him here, which he thinks the most poetical parts of it, the Law of the twelve tables, the book of Leviticus, &c.; or the book of Job, Jacob's dream, the story of Ruth, &c.?

4. Supernatural poetry is, in the sense here insisted on, allied to nature, not to art, because it relates to the impressions made upon the mind by unknown objects and powers, out of the reach both of the cognizance and will of man, and still more able to startle and confound his imagination, while he supposes them to exist, than either those of nature or art. The Witches in Macbeth, the Furies in Æschylus, are so far artificial objects that they are creatures of the poet's brain; but their impression on the mind depends on their possessing attributes which baffle and set at nought all human pretence, and laugh at all human efforts to tamper with them. Satan in Milton is an artificial or ideal character: but would any one call this artificial poetry? It is, in Lord Byron's phrase, super-artificial, as well as super-human

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poetry. But it is serious business. Fate, if not Nature, is its ruling genius. The Pandemonium is not a baby-house of the fancy, and it is ranked (ordinarily) with natural, *i. e.* with the highest and most important order of poetry, and above the Rape of the Lock. I intended a definition, and have run again into examples. Lord Byron's *concretions* have spoiled me for philosophy.

THE END.

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